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ABSTRACT

This how-to guide, which is designed to assist state and local welfare reform efforts, explains how to design, implement, and manage mandatory stay-in-school (learnfare) programs for teenage parents on welfare. The following topics are discussed in the guide's five chapters: the importance of focusing on teen parents on welfare, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program model, and other programs for teen parents; targeting issues (determining program exemption criteria, making the most of limited resources, extending learnfare to teens who receive welfare but are not parents); program design (allowable activities, aspects of school performance to encourage, services and special services, and bonuses and threats of sanctions); implementation challenges (key operational tasks, key staff and system capabilities, best ways of identifying and enrolling eligible teens, streamlining financial incentives and sanctions, linkages with schools); and program management (responsibility for running learnfare programs, staff duties, administrator roles, ways of maximizing participation, noncompliance with program rules, evaluation of programs' effectiveness). Checklists of best practices conclude chapters 2-5. Appended are the teenage parent provisions of the 1996 federal welfare law and four tables from the LEAP evaluation. (Contains 51 references and a list of 51 recent publications on Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation projects.) (MN)

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ReWORKing Welfare

Technical Assistance for States and Localities

Learnfare

How to Implement a Mandatory Stay-in-School Program for Teenage Parents on Welfare

David A. Long
Johannes M. Bos

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ReWORKing Welfare

Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A How-to Guide

Learnfare

How to Implement a Mandatory Stay-in-School Program for Teenage Parents on Welfare

David A. Long
Johannes M. Bos

September 1998

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Preface

The teen parent provisions of the federal welfare law — the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 — have focused attention on the special situation of teen parents on welfare. Though they make up a small share of all families on public assistance, they are more likely than others to stay on welfare for a long time. Thus, welfare cases that began with a teen birth account for more than half of all welfare expenditures. Teen parents who do not complete high school are also likely to have a more difficult time competing in the labor market and earning wages that can get their families out of poverty.

The federal law requires that teen parents live at home and attend school (or an alternative approved activity) in order to receive welfare. As states implement these requirements, they can learn from past programs that have had similar goals. This guide presents issues and lessons from Ohio's LEAP program and other programs that encourage teen parents to stay in school. While there are no clear answers to many of the questions posed in this guide, the guide presents options and trade-offs as well as practical advice for policymakers and program administrators.

This publication is the fifth in a series of "how-to" guides that are part of MDRC's ReWORKing Welfare technical assistance project. The project seeks to distill, synthesize, and share lessons from our research and field experience to help states and localities make informed decisions in this new environment. We are grateful for the support of the ReWORKing Welfare funders; they are listed at the front of the guide.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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At MDRC, we would like particularly to thank Amy Brown, who helped us translate research findings into concrete lessons for policymakers and program developers. Judith M. Gueron, David Butler, Veronica Fellerath, Robert Granger, Judith Greissman, and Robert Ivry reviewed drafts and offered helpful comments. Julian Brash and Ejim Dike fact-checked the guide; Alice Tufel served as editor; and Stephanie Cowell and Patt Pontevolpe did the word processing. The guide was designed by Edward Rowe and his colleagues at Rowe & Ballantine.

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Finally, we thank the young parents and staff in all the programs discussed. Without the solid data their experiences provided, we could not have attempted to draw the broader lessons presented in this document.

The Authors

Chapter 1
Introduction

Focusing on teen parents on welfare

Dropping out of school is often associated with teenage childbearing, as are welfare dependence, persistent poverty, and poor outcomes for children born to teenage dropouts. Research shows that the earnings prospects of women who have not finished school have steadily declined since the 1970s, making it very difficult for mothers without high school credentials to leave welfare and become self-sufficient.[1]

To address these issues, programs for teenage parents were developed during the last two decades by schools, health agencies, and community-based organizations. These programs typically provide educational instruction — often in preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) test — and sometimes have included counseling, parenting classes, and other services to small numbers of young women who volunteered for the programs. Often, these programs have reached only a small share of the teen parents on welfare, sometimes at a relatively high cost per enrollee.

Beginning in the 1980s, state welfare agencies implemented welfare-to-work programs, geared to adults, that have included education, training, and job search activities. These programs induced participation in employment and training activities by adopting participation requirements and enforcing them with possible grant reductions (i.e., "sanctions"). However, teenage parents generally were exempted from these activities, usually because of the young age of their children. In 1987, Wisconsin started its Learnfare program, which extended the mandatory approach of adult welfare-to-work programs to younger welfare recipients. Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program was initiated soon after Wisconsin's Learnfare program, and was developed in an attempt to reduce future welfare receipt by encouraging teen mothers to complete high school.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 — the landmark federal welfare legislation — replaced the existing

1. Levy and Murnane, 1992; Murnane, Willett, and Boudett, 1995.

welfare system, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with a program of block grants to states, called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF. The block grants give states great flexibility in operating welfare programs but also include certain requirements. One such requirement states that teenage parents under the age of 18 who have not completed high school or its equivalent must attend school or an alternative approved education or training program as a condition for receiving federally funded assistance. It is up to states to implement this requirement as they design their own approaches to welfare reform. In fact, when the 1996 Act was signed into law, about half of the states already had similar requirements in place, often in the form of "learnfare" programs that required teen parents on welfare to enroll in school. However, even these programs were often small in scale or differed in key ways from the federal mandate.

This guide raises questions that confront state and local welfare administrators who are responsible for implementing the teen parent provisions of the 1996 welfare law and provides answers based on research findings and program experiences. MDRC's evaluation of the LEAP program, which the Ohio Department of Human Services has operated statewide since 1989, is the principal source of research information used in this guide. The evaluation began in 1989 and the final report was published in 1997. Evaluation findings from other learnfare programs are limited, but are referenced when appropriate. They include the Wisconsin Learnfare program and California's Cal-Learn program. The guide also discusses findings from three programs for teens that are not learnfare programs: the New Chance Demonstration, the Quantum Opportunities Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD).

This guide is organized into five chapters. The rest of this introduction describes the LEAP program, summarizes the research findings from MDRC's evaluation of LEAP, and briefly discusses the other programs mentioned above. The remaining chapters focus on specific questions and answers about learnfare policy and programs. Chapter 2 lays out some of the key options policymakers have in designing a learnfare program for teen parents on welfare, helping officials weigh the possible advantages and drawbacks of these options. Chapter 3 addresses operational and cost questions. Chapter 4 looks at ways to increase the effectiveness of learnfare programs. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses some of the day-to-day management issues involved in running a learnfare program. While the answers to all these questions depend on a state's own policy goals and local environment, we present lessons and guidance based on research and program experience. Each chapter ends with a checklist of best practices and advice for policymakers and program administrators. Appendix A summarizes the provisions of the 1996 federal welfare legislation that relate to teen parents, and Appendix B presents detailed tables on the LEAP program's impacts from MDRC's evaluation of the program.

The LEAP program model

The LEAP program differs from the earlier initiatives described above in three major ways: its mandate and scale, its use of financial incentives, and its other services. This section discusses each of these unique aspects.

LEAP's mandate and scale

All teen parents receiving TANF in Ohio who are in school or have dropped out are automatically included in LEAP. Participation is mandatory for all pregnant women and custodial parents under 20 years of age who are receiving TANF and do not have a high school diploma or GED. This group includes both teens who head welfare cases and teen parents who receive assistance on someone else's case (usually their mother's). Teens can be temporarily exempted from the LEAP requirements for health reasons, if child care or transportation is unavailable, or for other reasons considered legitimate by the program. Teens are no longer subject to LEAP's requirement after they reach the age of 20, or when they graduate from high school or receive a GED.

Teen parents in LEAP are required to enroll (or remain enrolled) in and regularly attend a school or education program leading to a high school diploma or GED. Recent changes to LEAP provide some flexibility with regard to teen parents who are no longer of compulsory school age (i.e., have reached age 18). If an appropriate education activity cannot be found for such a teen, she can instead participate in Ohio's Work First Program, the employment and training program for adult TANF recipients.

LEAP's use of financial incentives

LEAP relies primarily on grant bonuses and sanctions to increase school attendance and achieve its goals. LEAP has a three-tiered incentive structure:

- **Grant increases.** Teens receive an additional $62 bonus payment in their welfare check for every month in which they meet the program's attendance requirement. Up until October 1996, they also received an annual one-time enrollment bonus of $62, but this payment has been eliminated.
- **Grant reductions.** Teens who do not attend an initial LEAP assessment interview (which begins their participation in the program), or who fail to enroll in school, have $62 deducted from their grant (i.e., the teens are "sanctioned") each month until they comply with program rules. Similarly, enrolled teens are sanctioned by $62 for each month in which they exceed the allowed number of unexcused absences. After six consecutive

months of sanctions, the entire cash grant for the teen and her children is eliminated.[2]

- **Unchanged grants.** Teens who exceed the allowed number of total absences, but do not exceed the allowed number of unexcused absences, receive neither a bonus nor a sanction.

LEAP sanctions and bonuses can substantially change the income of participants. During the time the LEAP evaluation was carried out, a teen parent living on her own with one child was eligible for an AFDC grant of $274 per month. A bonus increased her grant to $336; a sanction reduced it to $212. Thus, the total difference in AFDC grants between a teen who enrolled in school and attended regularly and one who failed to enroll and attend without good cause was $124 per month.

LEAP differs from most learnfare programs in that it offers both positive and negative financial incentives. Most other learnfare programs implement grant reductions when teens who are mandated to attend school fail to do so, but do not provide bonuses when they comply with the mandate.

In addition to enrollment and attendance, LEAP offers financial incentives for grade completion and graduation. Teens can earn a $62 bonus for the successful completion of a grade level and $200 upon the receipt of a high school diploma or GED. These two payments were added in the fall of 1996, partly in response to early research findings from MDRC's evaluation. These bonuses create a modest incentive for teens to remain in regular high school and provide an additional reward for getting their diploma.

Other LEAP services

LEAP's financial incentives are central to the program model, but LEAP also includes other elements. Specialized case managers explain program rules, offer guidance, and monitor teens' compliance. Assistance with child care and transportation is provided so that teens can attend school. LEAP does not offer other services, such as special classes, internships, or job placement assistance. Instead, the program relies on public schools and the adult education system to provide the education teens need to graduate or earn a GED.

Two preexisting Ohio Department of Education programs, however, provide further support for teen parents. The GRADS (Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role Skills) program was designed to facilitate school attendance for high school students who are also teen parents. Through GRADS, which operates in many Ohio high schools, as well as a few junior high schools and vocational schools, home economics teachers are trained to provide instruction and facilitate

2. The latter provision is contingent on a face-to-face meeting taking placing between the teen and her caseworker. Such a meeting is supposed to happen after two consecutive sanctions have been incurred. Its purpose is to inform the caseworker of the teen's reason for noncompliance and to address any barriers to participation that may exist.

services to pregnant and parenting teenagers. LEAP's implementation has also been assisted by another Department of Education program, GOALS (Graduation, Occupation, and Living Skills), which targets young parents who have dropped out. GOALS offers classes in personal development, career exploration, and parenting, usually linked with adult education classes.

Finally, in the City of Cleveland an enhanced version of LEAP was implemented as a special demonstration project without the LEAP evaluation. The enhanced services included school-based case management, which provided teens with increased adult support and monitoring and more recognition of their achievements in school. Day care centers were also established in some high schools to make it more convenient for teens to attend.

A summary of LEAP research findings

The LEAP program was evaluated using an experimental research design, which many consider the most reliable way to measure the impacts of such programs. In such a research design, two groups of eligible teens are selected using a random selection process, similar to a lottery. While one of the groups (called the "program group") is subject to the program, the other (called the "control group") is not. Follow-up data are collected for both groups, and outcomes for the control group capture what would have happened to the program group in the absence of the program. Thus, comparing the outcomes for the two groups produces a valid estimate of the impacts of the program. This type of research design has been used to evaluate many programs for welfare recipients, and has yielded reliable results that have been used by policymakers to develop new approaches to address problems facing welfare recipients.

The evaluation of LEAP found that Ohio's learnfare program, as it was operated prior to the 1996 changes, had mixed results.[3] The research findings are organized here into four categories: implementation findings; impacts on school enrollment and completion; impacts on welfare receipt, employment, and earnings; and program costs. The findings are generally presented separately for two groups of teen parents: those who were already enrolled in high school or a GED program when they entered the study (and the LEAP program), and those who had dropped out by the time they entered the study. Brief tables are included in the text; more detailed ones can be found in Appendix B.

Implementation findings

- **LEAP was successfully implemented statewide.** After some start-up problems in the first year, the LEAP incentive structure was successfully implemented by county welfare departments. This means that following the start-up period, teens in the program experienced an efficient and predictable system of incentives based on the program design.

3. Long et al., 1996; Bos and Fellerath, 1997.

- **Almost all eligible teens were touched by LEAP's incentives.** The LEAP program had a broad impact on those enrolled in the program. Fully 93 percent of teen parents in LEAP earned at least one bonus or sanction, with the average teen qualifying for about six grant adjustments (3.5 bonus payments and 2.8 sanctions) during her first 18 months in the program. Seventy-five percent of teens earned at least one bonus and 56 percent qualified for at least one sanction.

Impacts on school enrollment and completion

- **LEAP increased school enrollment.** Table 1 shows that the program had substantial impacts on school enrollment. Teen parents in the program were more likely to be enrolled in high school and GED programs than their control group counterparts, and were also enrolled for a greater number of months. In the first year after teens entered the program, LEAP increased the percentage who were continuously enrolled in high school[4] from 28.7 to 36.0 percent and the percentage who were in a GED program from 3.5 to 6.2 percent. The average number of months in high school increased by 0.6, from 4.2 to 4.8 months, and there was a 0.5-month increase in participation in GED programs. A closer look at the data (see Appendix Table B.1) reveals that these impacts were achieved for teens who were still in school when they entered LEAP and for those who had already dropped out (that is, more of those teens returned to school under LEAP).

4. To be continuously enrolled in high school, a student had to be enrolled for at least 10 months out of the school year. The school year has been defined to include summer school which amounts to 12 months in Ohio.

Table 1

LEAP's 12-Month Impacts on School Enrollment

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
	Full 12-Month Survey Sample			
In the 12 months after random assignment				
Enrolled 10 or more months in (%)[a]				
High school	36.0	28.7	7.3***	25.4
A GED program	6.2	3.5	2.7**	77.1
Average number of months enrolled in[a]				
High school	4.8	4.2	0.6**	14.3
A GED program	1.3	0.8	0.5***	62.5

SOURCES and FURTHER NOTES: See Appendix Table B.1. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

a. Months after teens graduated from high school or received a GED are counted as months of enrollment.

- **LEAP also increased grade completion.** The effects on school enrollment translated into increases in grade completion. Appendix Table B.2 shows that program group members in LEAP were significantly more likely to have completed ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade by the time they were interviewed in a survey conducted approximately three years after teens entered the program.

- **LEAP had less impact on school completion.** LEAP's initial success in connecting teen parents to school was not sustained through the completion of their studies. Three years after enrollment, the program had not increased teens' high school graduation rates, although those in the program group were somewhat more likely to have earned a GED certificate than were their counterparts in the control group. As evident in Table 2, however, this latter impact was found only for teens who were in school when they entered LEAP. For these teens, the program more than doubled the percentage holding a GED, from 4.4 to 10.0 percent. Led by this increase, by the end of three years of follow-up, 45.6 percent of LEAP teens who were initially enrolled had a high school diploma or a GED, as opposed to 38.6 percent of the control group. Among dropouts

Table 2

LEAP's Three-Year Impacts on High School Graduation and GED

Status Three Years After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
Full Three-Year Survey Sample				
Ever graduated from high school (%)	22.9	23.5	-0.6	-2.6
Ever received a GED (%)	11.1	8.4	2.7	32.1
Ever graduated from high or received a GED (%)	34.0	31.9	2.1	6.6
Sample Members Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever graduated from high school (%)	35.6	34.2	1.4	4.1
Ever received a GED (%)	10.0	4.4	5.6**	127.3
Ever graduated from high or received a GED (%)	45.6	38.6	7.0*	18.1
Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever graduated from high school (%)	6.7	7.8	-1.1	-14.1
Ever received a GED (%)	12.0	14.3	-2.3	-16.1
Ever graduated from high or received a GED (%)	18.6	22.1	-3.4	-15.4

SOURCES and FURTHER NOTES: See Appendix Table B.2. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

these rates were much lower (hovering around 20 percent), and there was no significant difference between the program group and the control group.

- **Impacts were less promising for teens who had already dropped out.** As evidenced above, results for teens who were initially enrolled in high school or a GED program were more encouraging than those for teens who had already dropped out at the point they became eligible for LEAP. This lack of success with dropouts is particularly troubling given that the program imposed numerous financial penalties on them. Indeed, approximately one-fourth of the dropouts in LEAP received nine or more grant reductions and no bonus payments while they were eligible for the program. Teens whose welfare grants had been reduced many times reported diminished spending on essentials for their children as well as for themselves.

- **Impacts were stronger for teens who were younger and had fewer children.** Analyses of outcomes for subgroups of teens suggest the importance of early intervention. Breakdowns of the research findings indicate that the program's impacts were strongest for teens who were pregnant with their first child when they started LEAP; the program had a somewhat smaller effect on teens who started with one child, and no effect on teens with two or more children. Among in-school teens, LEAP had a larger impact on school completion by teens who were under age 18, and at or close to their age-for-grade level, than it did on school completion by teens who were older or more than a year behind grade level.

- **The provision of special services improved program outcomes.** As part of the special demonstration in the City of Cleveland, half of the program group received enhanced services — including in-school day care and school-based case management — and half did not. Teens who received the enhanced services were more likely to graduate or earn a GED than the other group. This is especially noteworthy because LEAP did not significantly increase high school graduations outside Cuyahoga County (of which the City of Cleveland is a part) and produced only modest increases in GED receipt across the board.

Impacts on welfare receipt, employment, and earnings

- **LEAP increased employment and earnings only for in-school teens.** As shown in Table 3, over a four-year period, teens who were already enrolled in school when they entered LEAP were employed significantly more quarters than their counterparts in the control group. As a result, these teens earned $544 more during the follow-up period than control group members. However, for teens who had already

dropped out of school and for the full sample, LEAP did not increase employment or earnings over the four-year period.

- **Almost all teens experienced employment and earnings growth.** While LEAP's impacts in this area were limited to in-school teens, it is important to note that all teens — including teens in both the program and control groups and both in-school teens and dropouts — experienced substantial growth in their employment rates and earnings over the course of the follow-up period. This can be seen in Appendix Table B.3, which provides greater detail on teens' employment histories. By the end of four years, nearly 80 percent of all teens had worked in a job covered by Unemployment Insurance.

Table 3

LEAP's Four-Year Impacts on Employment and Earnings

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
		Full Sample		
Ever employed (%)	78.2	76.6	1.6	2.1
Number of quarters employed	3.99	3.88	0.11	2.8
Total earnings ($)	4,405	4,293	112	2.6
		Sample Members Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment		
Ever employed (%)	81.6	80.6	1.0	1.2
Number of quarters employed	4.41	4.03	0.38**	9.4
Total earnings ($)	4,862	4,319	544	12.6
		Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment		
Ever employed (%)	74.4	72.3	2.1	2.9
Number of quarters employed	3.52	3.72	-0.20	-5.4
Total earnings ($)	3,930	4,271	-341	-8.0

SOURCE and FURTHER NOTES: See Appendix Table B.3. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

- **LEAP reduced welfare receipt among all participating teens.** Table 4 (and Appendix Table B.4) shows LEAP's impacts on welfare receipt for the last two years of the four-year follow-up period. (Data for earlier years were unavailable.) On average, each teen in the program group received $275 less in AFDC payments than did her counterparts in the control group. These welfare reductions were not directly caused by program sanctions, as teens in LEAP received an equal number of grant bonuses. Instead, it appears that teens who had other support to fall back on (such

as help from their parents or partners) were more likely to forgo welfare, possibly because of the perceived hassle associated with the program. Interestingly, the welfare impacts were found for both teens who were in school and those who had already dropped out when they entered LEAP, even though, as discussed above, dropouts did not experience concomitant increases in their employment and earnings.

Table 4

LEAP's Impacts on AFDC Receipt in Years 3 and 4

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
		Full Sample		
Ever received AFDC (%)	86.0	88.9	-2.9**	-3.3
Number of months on AFDC	15.27	16.03	-0.76**	-4.7
AFDC amount received ($)	5,185	5,459	-275**	-5.0
		Sample Members Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment		
Ever received AFDC (%)	87.0	89.4	-2.4	-2.6
Number of months on AFDC	15.55	16.35	-0.80*	-4.9
AFDC amount received ($)	5,181	5,497	-316**	-5.7
		Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or a GED Program at Random Assignment		
Ever received AFDC (%)	84.5	88.0	-3.5*	-4.0
Number of months on AFDC	14.86	15.57	-0.71	-4.6
AFDC amount received ($)	5,172	5,395	-223	-4.1

SOURCE and FURTHER NOTES: See Appendix Table B.4. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Costs of operating LEAP

- **LEAP's operating expenses were relatively low.** The cost to the welfare department of operating the basic LEAP program was less than $1,400 per eligible teen (or about $750 per teen per year). Case management and county administrative costs accounted for 82 percent of the net cost, transportation expenses accounted for 10 percent, and child care for 5 percent. The financial incentives themselves did not add to the program's net cost because, on average, teens received slightly more sanctions than bonuses. In addition to these "direct" program costs (incurred by the welfare department), total program costs include the cost of education and training services provided. In the LEAP evaluation, these costs were estimated at $332 per teen, over the full four-year

follow-up period. Most of these costs were incurred by high schools, which served the additional students who were induced to stay in school (or return there) by LEAP. The enhanced school-based services in Cleveland described earlier added an additional $1,400 per teen to the program cost.

- **The net cost of operating LEAP was negligible.** The welfare savings from LEAP (savings in public assistance, Food Stamps and Medicaid payments), even for years after teens were no longer required to participate in the program, were substantial enough to completely offset the direct program costs to the welfare department. As a result, the program broke even from the perspective of the welfare department.

- **LEAP teens experienced a net loss of $1,110 over the four years.** Both teen parents who were initially enrolled in school and those who had already dropped out experienced losses — reductions in welfare, Food Stamps, and Medicaid eligibility — that were not offset by gains from earnings and tax credits. This loss was especially pronounced for teens who had dropped out before LEAP reached them, as earnings effects were nonexistent for this group. On the other hand, LEAP teens may experience long-term benefits from the additional education they received that may outweigh the losses in the four years covered by the evaluation.

Description and results of other programs for teen parents

The evaluation findings from the LEAP program are complemented by the results of other studies involving teen parents on welfare. Five programs, and their available results, are outlined below. More than anything else, together they provide evidence of the difficulty of serving low-income teens, especially those who have dropped out of high school.

- **Wisconsin's Learnfare Program.** The State of Wisconsin has operated a learnfare program that is similar to LEAP in many ways, but differs in two main ways. First, Wisconsin's program does not offer bonuses to teens — only sanctions for noncompliance. Second, the program extends to teens who are not parents themselves but who are receiving public assistance on someone else's case (usually their mother's).

  The Wisconsin program has been evaluated by the state's Legislative Audit Bureau.[5] As in LEAP evaluation, the Wisconsin Learnfare study found that the program increased school enrollment by teen parents in the

5. State of Wisconsin, Legislative Audit Bureau, 1996.

short term. However, in Wisconsin, this impact faded quickly. The study did not differentiate between program impacts for in-school teens and dropouts.

- **The Cal-Learn Program.** Cal-Learn, California's welfare reform teen parent program, was implemented statewide in 1994.[6] The Cal-Learn program includes intensive case management services, assistance with child care and transportation costs needed for school participation, and bonuses and sanctions based on school progress. Cal-Learn teens can earn up to four $100 bonuses or sanctions each year: $100 bonuses for report cards reflecting a "C" average or better; and $100 sanctions (applied over two months) for report cards reflecting less than a "D" average. Teens are eligible for Cal-Learn until they turn 19, at which point they may continue to participate in the program on a voluntary basis until they are 20 years old, as long as they were in Cal-Learn when they were 18 and have not graduated from high school or received a GED. In 1996-97, the program served an average of 22,400 teens per month. A large-scale evaluation of the Cal-Learn program is currently under way.

- **The Teenage Parent Demonstration.** The Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD) operated in Illinois and New Jersey during the late 1980s and early 1990s. TPD differed from LEAP by focusing more on the teen parents' transition into employment. Pregnant and parenting teens on welfare were required to participate in education, skills training, or job search programs. Case managers helped teens find appropriate programs and provided counseling and encouragement. Teens who persistently failed to participate faced sanctions in the form of grant reductions.

  An evaluation by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., found that TPD increased employment and earnings among teens who were in school when they were assigned to the program.[7] It also reduced their receipt of public assistance. However, impacts for dropouts were less encouraging than those for in-school youth, as was the case in the LEAP evaluation.

- **The New Chance Demonstration.** New Chance was a voluntary demonstration program that targeted teen parents on welfare who were school dropouts (it did not enroll in-school youth). The program, which was launched in 1989, offered comprehensive services to these teens: education and training, life skills, family planning and health instruction, parenting education, and child care. The services, which also included case management, were provided in a caring yet demanding environment and mostly at a single location.

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6. California Department of Social Services web page.

7. Kisker and Rangarajan, 1997; and Maynard, Nicholson, and Rangarajan, 1993. See also Granger and Cytron, 1998.

The findings from the evaluation of New Chance were consistent with those from LEAP and TPD: the program's impacts on employment, earnings, and welfare receipt were limited, even though there were substantial impacts on GED receipt.[8] Although the New Chance program did not improve the economic outcomes of those in the program group beyond the levels achieved by the control group, this was in part due to control group members' getting high levels of education and skills training in other programs. Thus, although New Chance participants received more services than their counterparts in the control group, the difference was not large enough to produce a strong effect on the young women's employment rates and earnings. Those parents in both the program and the control group who completed education and training programs saw increased employment and earnings.

- **The Quantum Opportunities Program.** The Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) was initially operated by community-based organizations in five communities: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Saginaw, Michigan; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; San Antonio, Texas; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. QOP provided small groups of high school students with intensive services, including tutoring, homework assistance, computer-assisted instruction, and life skills activities. It fostered strong relationships between the teens and "caring adults," who could be program counselors, teachers, or others. The students received a stipend of $1 to $1.33 for each hour spent in the program, which was matched with a savings account for post-program activities, such as college and training. The program cost about $10,000 per student for a four-year period.

  An evaluation of QOP, which involved a small research sample, found substantial increases in high school graduation rates, and college attendance.[9] Participants also were less likely to drop out or become teen parents than were members of a control group. QOP is now being replicated in additional sites and a larger-scale evaluation of the program is underway.

8. Quint, Bos, and Polit, 1997; and Granger and Cytron, 1998.

9. Hahn, Leavitt, and Aaron, 1994.

Chapter 2

Targeting Issues

In most program environments, resources are limited. This means that welfare administrators and program planners must set priorities: Who should be served first? Who should receive the most attention from case managers and other program staff? Who can benefit most from limited resources? Even when a welfare department tries to serve its entire caseload, it still needs to target its resources in such a way that they are used most efficiently and benefit those who need them most. This leads to the following questions, discussed in this chapter:

- Why target teen parents on welfare for special attention?
- Should any teens be exempt from a learnfare program?
- How can programs with limited resources best target teen parents?
- Should learnfare be extended to teens who receive welfare but are not parents themselves?

The chapter ends with a checklist of best practices for targeting learnfare programs.

Why target teen parents on welfare for special attention?

There are a number of reasons why it makes sense for states to dedicate resources to serving teen parents on welfare. Even though teenage mothers represent a relatively small proportion of all mothers on welfare, they are likely to remain on the welfare rolls for extended periods, especially if they are high school dropouts.[1] For this reason, grants to teenage mothers and women who

1. Bane and Ellwood's (1983) pioneering analysis of data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) indicated that nonwhite women who went on welfare after giving birth as unmarried mothers and who were high school dropouts averaged 10 years on the welfare rolls. More recent evidence suggests that multiple welfare spells and cycling on and off the welfare rolls are common among young mothers.

had their first child as teenagers account for the majority of welfare expenditures. A recent study found that teenage childbearing cost the country $2.2 billion annually in Welfare and Food stamp benefits, along with $3.4 billion in medical care costs, foster care expenses, and prison construction to house prisoners who had been the children of teenage mothers.[2]

The importance of teen parents as a group is magnified by the 1996 federal law, which establishes special rules for teen parents (under age 18) on welfare, most notably that they attend school or participate in alternative educational activities and that they live with a parent or guardian.[3] The law also places a five-year time limit on federally funded public assistance, though states can set shorter limits which many have done. Because teen parents and their children tend to remain on welfare longer, the potential effect of such limits is especially great for them.

Targeting teen parents with learnfare programs offers financial advantages for welfare systems as well. Because learnfare programs are focused primarily on school attendance, most program "services" are provided by schools. Welfare department expenses are largely limited to case management, child care, and transportation. Furthermore, services provided to this group — assuming the program is effective — potentially have very substantial long-term benefits, both for the family involved and for taxpayers who would be responsible for welfare payments and other longer-term services.

Finally, it makes sense to implement special programs for teen parents on welfare because they do not fit neatly into welfare-to-work programs designed for adult recipients. Teen parents present unique opportunities and challenges — they have less welfare experience but sparser work histories than the caseload as a whole, and also have younger children. They are less experienced parents, who may need help with that aspect of their lives as well. Usually, program goals for teens are also different — educational achievement as opposed to employment. These factors translate into different program messages, and different data, case management, and support service needs.

Should any teens be exempt from a learnfare program?

Programs often use exemptions to exclude certain individuals from participation requirements. For example, many welfare-to-work programs exempt parents who are pregnant or have very young children, those with medical problems, or those caring for a disabled family member. The exemptions may be temporary or permanent, and they are usually reserved for individuals for whom program participation is considered inappropriate.

2. Maynard, 1997.

3. See Appendix A for a detailed description of the federal law.

Both Ohio's LEAP program and Wisconsin's Learnfare program minimize exemption criteria, so the requirements apply to virtually all teen parents and pregnant teens on welfare in their respective states. They include teens who head their own welfare case as well as teens who are still on someone else's case (usually their mother's). It is noteworthy that in both states, the broad application of the program mandates has been genuine, as program administrators have used the resources necessary to work with all eligible teens.

Such an approach has important advantages. First, it creates clear expectations for all teen parents on welfare: no one is forever exempt from participating, and everyone is ultimately subject to the same mandate. Second, it eliminates complicated and expensive targeting and selection procedures, which otherwise would be necessary to determine whom the mandate is applied to and who is considered exempt. This broad application of the program mandate is also consistent with the intent of the federal law.

Like many programs, LEAP originally exempted pregnant teens. However, such an exemption raises questions about a program's objectives and fairness. Unless a teen has a problem pregnancy (for which a medical exemption would be available), it is not clear why such an exemption is needed. Indeed, most schools do not recognize pregnancy as an excuse for school absences, whether or not a student is on welfare. Moreover, a pregnancy exemption may well send an unintended message to teens: if you have a second child, the program will let you off the hook. Ohio eliminated the pregnancy exemption from the LEAP program, starting in the fall of 1996. The effects of this program change have not yet been evaluated, but program staff say it reduces school dropout among teen parents who become pregnant again.

At the same time, it will probably be necessary to offer some opportunities for exceptions in certain situations. For example, in Ohio and Wisconsin, teens with very young infants, medical problems, or no access to child care or transportation are not subject to learnfare requirements. Limiting these categorical exemptions allowing them only on a case-by-case basis, or providing only for temporary exemptions can help ensure that almost all teens are subject to the requirements and that the broad mandate and message are maintained. Ensuring that support services such as child care and transportation are adequately funded, and assisting teen parents in putting those supports in place, can also help limit the number of teens who are unable to participate.

How can programs with limited resources best target teen parents?

In some situations, it may make sense to begin working with a subset of the teen parent population. These include: a situation where resources are not sufficient to serve the entire teen population; a state in which the vast majority of teen parents on welfare are concentrated in a few counties; or a state that wishes

to pilot its learnfare program before implementing it statewide. Targeting in these situations might focus on younger teens, those with only one child, those residing in certain areas, or new welfare applicants. Remember, however, that if targeting means that some teens who are under 18 are excluded from learnfare requirements, their welfare grants may not be covered by federal TANF funds.

For example, the Teenage Parent Demonstration, described earlier, was directed only to newly eligible teens — that is, teens who are pregnant or have only one child and who have just come on the welfare rolls. This targeting tactic simplified implementation of the program. It also meant that no teens experienced a "distorted" version of the program. Consider, for example, a 19-year-old teen who has been on welfare all her life, had her first child when she was 16, and has been out of school for three years. Had a learnfare program been in place three years ago, she would have experienced the program as policymakers intended. Enrolling her now asks the program to do something very different — induce her to return to school. This is an important consideration, especially because MDRC's research in Ohio showed that LEAP had relatively little effect on older, out-of-school teens.

Another way to target limited resources is by focusing on specific geographic areas. The Teenage Parent Demonstration was also limited to urban areas — Chicago, Illinois, and Newark and Camden, New Jersey — rather than operating throughout the two states. Other states have similarly focused on selected urban areas where the teen parent population is concentrated. If resources are limited, these are logical places to target a learnfare program. Special services may also be targeted to city high schools with large numbers of eligible teens; MDRC's research in Cleveland suggests this may be an effective use of resources.

Should learnfare be extended to teens who receive welfare but are not parents themselves?

Among the learnfare programs reviewed in the preparation of this guide, only Wisconsin's program extends to teens who are part of a household that receives welfare but who are not parents themselves (such as a teen whose mother heads a welfare case that includes the mother and teenage child). There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. On the one hand, a compelling case can be made for including such teens, because including them promotes school attendance among an at-risk population and helps ensure that teens are targeted early. As shown in Chapter 1, LEAP was far more successful for teens who were in school when they began participating than those who had already dropped out. Teen parents who are on welfare often have dropped out of school *before* becoming pregnant or giving birth. Thus, by the time these teens are eligible for most learnfare programs, many are already out of school and therefore a greater challenge to serve. A program that targets teens before they become pregnant is more likely to catch them before they drop out.

However, targeting teens who are not parents presents operational challenges. Welfare departments usually have no contact with teens who do not head a welfare case. Therefore, identifying them and forming relationships with them is much more difficult. Furthermore, because these teens do not receive a welfare grant themselves, the relationship between school attendance and financial incentives and sanctions is much weaker. If a teen fails to comply, it is the head of household, not the teen, who experiences the direct loss of income. Finally, the decision as to whether or not to pursue this option may hinge mostly on resource issues. Inclusion of nonparenting teens on welfare substantially increases the scale and cost of operating a learnfare program, and will use resources for some teens who would never have dropped out or come on welfare themselves.

Checklist of best practices

The checklist that follows summarizes some of the key points and best practices regarding targeting issues faced by learnfare programs.

✔ **Understand the federal teen parent requirements.** The federal law is very specific in requiring that cash assistance (attributable to federal funds) cannot be given to minor teens unless they attend school. States have three options: they can adopt the federal requirements; they can ignore them and face the loss of TANF funds; or they can use state funds to provide assistance to minor teens who are not in school.

✔ **Make explicit policy decisions.** States should respond to the federal law by making an explicit up-front choice about how they will treat teen parents on welfare. The decisions should cover: what will be required of teen parents, what incentives or sanctions will support those requirements, and how will the requirements be implemented and monitored. If state requirements differ from the federal law, decisions must also be made as to how the program will be funded.

✔ **Create a special program for teen parents.** Teen parents on welfare present policymakers with different challenges and opportunities than adult recipients. Establishing a separate program for them — rather than simply including them in broader welfare-to-work programs — ensures that a unique message is sent to teen parents and that staff focus special attention on serving this population.

✔ **Create a broad mandate.** To the extent possible, learnfare programs should engage all teen parents on welfare. Limiting program exemptions and exceptions helps send a clear message to teen parents that, whatever their situation, they are expected to complete school.

✔ **Provide an outlet for exemptions.** At the same time, it is important to provide some opportunities for exemptions in individual cases. One way to balance this with a broad mandate is to limit up-front or automatic exemptions, while giving case managers the flexibility to exempt some teens later on. Another is to allow only temporary exemptions, so that all teens will eventually face the learnfare requirement.

✔ **Prioritize whom you will serve first.** If resources do not allow the entire teen parent population to be served, or if the program is being phased in gradually, decide who should be served first. You might focus on young teens, teens who are pregnant or have only one child, teens residing in urban areas, or those who are new welfare applicants.

Chapter 3
Program Design

Once program planners have determined who will be targeted by a learnfare program, they need to define the specifics of the program design — in other words, what the program will look like and how it will attempt to achieve its goals. These issues lead to the following questions, which are discussed in this chapter:

- What activities should be allowable under a learnfare program?
- What aspects of school performance should be encouraged?
- What services should be offered with a learnfare program?
- What special services can be provided to school dropouts?
- Should programs offer bonuses in addition to sanctions?

The chapter ends with a checklist of best practices for program design.

What activities should be allowable under a learnfare program?

LEAP, Cal-Learn, and Wisconsin's Learnfare program accept participation in only two activities to satisfy program mandates: high school attendance or attendance in a GED preparation program. This "pure" learnfare approach has the advantage of simplicity. It makes the program model easier to implement, because there are only a few participation standards to apply and only a few institutions to deal with. It also makes the program message easier to communicate to teen parents: It is simply, "We want you to finish school." This is the same message that state truancy laws give teens who are not parents.

The well-documented link between students' educational achievement and their subsequent labor market success, which has grown stronger over time,

provides a powerful rationale for using such a pure learnfare approach. The employment prospects for school dropouts are bleak and getting worse, which suggests that school completion may be critical to minimizing welfare dependency and economic hardship for families.[1]

Having said that, it is also the case that the more programs are able to give teens options as to how they will satisfy learnfare requirements, the more likely it will be that teens find an option that works for them. Most teens in learnfare programs attend traditional high schools, but many strongly prefer to attend alternative programs leading to a high school diploma or a GED — such as night school, "alternative" high school, home study, and so forth. For this reason, the availability of alternatives to traditional high school appears to be critical, especially for dropouts who are reluctant to return to the same schools in which they have previously failed. However, such alternatives are in scarce supply in some districts, particularly in smaller cities and rural areas. Even where these programs are available, school policies may have the unintended consequence of limiting teens' ability to access them. For example, because compulsory school attendance rules extend to age 18 in Ohio, many school districts do not permit younger teens to enter adult education programs. Increased availability of, and access to, alternatives to traditional high school might well be encouraged by learnfare administrators.

In some cases it may also be sensible to offer teen parents options other than just classroom education, especially if the teens are older and have been out of school for a long time. Programs are likely to have a hard time encouraging these teens to return to school (as the LEAP research described in Chapter 1 illustrates). Instead, they may be more motivated to engage in activities related more directly to employment, such as vocational training, on-the-job training, job search, job placement, or work experience.

What aspects of school performance should be encouraged?

The outcomes that are monitored and encouraged by learnfare programs should be those that promote the program's goals. Therefore, even though programs may allow some flexibility in the activities in which teens can participate, they should be careful to promote school completion — the primary goal of learnfare programs — at least as much as other outcomes. Financial incentives and the decision-making process for selecting activities should be geared toward rewarding high school enrollment, attendance, and completion above participation in GED programs or alternative employment and training activities.

To promote their education goals, traditional learnfare programs have focused on school attendance. However, this is only one aspect of school perfor-

1. Murnane, Willett, and Boudett, 1995.

mance. Financial incentives and/or sanctions may also be linked to other performance outcomes, such as school enrollment, successful course completion, and grades, all of which may be easier to monitor than daily attendance.

The Teenage Parent Demonstration monitored initial school enrollment, penalizing teens when they failed to enroll. Until October 1996, LEAP also offered a yearly bonus payment of $62 for school enrollment. The mechanics of monitoring enrollment are simple and inexpensive. The welfare department may ask teens to provide proof of enrollment, may periodically verify that program participants are still enrolled, or may arrange to be notified by the school district if students are no longer enrolled.

However, while enrollment is much easier to monitor than daily attendance, a program that focuses exclusively on enrollment status as its performance measure leaves teens room to miss classes and perform poorly without an immediate consequence. Wisconsin balances these two issues in the following way: every teen's enrollment is monitored and only if a teen is not enrolled or misses more than 10 school days in a semester is her subsequent daily attendance monitored. This reduces the administrative burden on the welfare agency, compared with LEAP, which monitors the daily attendance of all eligible teens. But this tactic also zeros in on the attendance of "problem" students.

In California's Cal-Learn program, bonuses and sanctions are applied based on students' course grades. For each report card period, if an enrolled teen receives an average grade of "C" or above, she earns a bonus, but if she flunks her courses she is given a sanction. A "D" average results in neither a bonus nor a sanction. Because students in most high schools automatically receive an "F" for missing more than a designated number of days of class, this approach potentially penalizes poor attendance as well as poor academic performance. Program administration is simplified, because it is the teen's responsibility to bring her report card to the welfare office.

Another attractive option is offering an additional bonus for graduating from high school or earning a GED. A program that rewards teens for enrolling in school or in an adult education program, for attending regularly after they enroll, or even for completing courses or earning good grades may provide little or no financial incentive for teens to complete their schooling successfully. Indeed, during the period of MDRC's evaluation, LEAP teens who completed school before turning 20 were actually penalized insofar as they stopped receiving program bonuses they could have earned by attending school longer. This may be one of the reasons that LEAP had an impact on attendance and on grade completion through the eleventh grade, but generally did not increase high school graduation rates.

Based on initial program findings, LEAP added two new types of bonus payments: $62 for the successful completion of a grade level and $200 upon the receipt of a high school diploma or GED. Grade completion bonuses are rewarded only to LEAP teens who are enrolled in regular high school. This bonus encourages teens to remain in regular high school, which may take more time

and effort on their behalf than enrolling in GED programs, but is also shown to have greater long-term economic benefits. California also offers a graduation bonus in its Cal-Learn program. It is hoped that this sends an appropriate signal to teens, although the effectiveness of the bonus has not yet been assessed. A graduation bonus also comes at an opportune time — as teens finish school and face the potentially expensive transitions to college, vocational training, or a job.

It may be advisable to use more than one performance measure. Using any school outcome to measure compliance with learnfare rules carries with it the possibility of "gaming the system." For example, an enrollment requirement can cause students to show up once and never return. An attendance requirement may cause them to put in "seat time" without participating or learning much. On the other hand, a grade point requirement put unintended pressure on teachers (who may be unwilling to do something that would decrease their students' benefits) for higher grades, causing grade inflation among teen parents in high school. Whatever criterion is chosen, steps must be taken to address these problems, preferably by rewarding several different types of school progress simultaneously.

Finally, learnfare program developers should consider special incentives to promote attendance of regular high school. Adult education programs usually take up less of participants' time and may be more flexible in terms of attendance policies, homework assignments, and such. This means that learnfare participants may have an incentive to choose such programs over regular high school. A learnfare program may prefer to keep teens in high school and to have them graduate with a regular high school diploma rather than a GED, a preference that has research support. In this case, the program and the high schools with which it cooperates should devise specific incentives to induce teens to choose regular high school.

What services should be offered with a learnfare program?

Learnfare programs, which rely mainly on existing public school systems to provide services, focus primarily on enforcing mandates and processing financial incentives and sanctions. As noted in Chapter 1, LEAP provides relatively few actual services to participants. This approach minimizes costs and promotes a mainstream education experience for teen parents. However, some important services are usually not provided in most schools and should be considered by welfare departments as they implement learnfare programs.

First, some level of case management is essential to virtually any learnfare initiative. In the LEAP program, teens' school attendance is monitored by designated case managers, who also provide information to the teens, initiate

bonuses and sanctions, and authorize assistance with child care and transportation. In this and other learnfare programs, the case manager's involvement begins at the point of eligibility determination and continues throughout a teen's period of eligibility.

In addition to case management, learnfare programs will need to assist teen parents with child care and possibly transportation. Child care arrangements are obviously important to the teen parent population, although it is unclear how much a learnfare program must spend on these arrangements. During the period covered by MDRC's evaluation of LEAP, Ohio provided assistance to LEAP teens only for state-licensed or certified child care. However, most teens indicated in a survey that they strongly preferred informal child care arrangements with relatives they knew or friends. Most LEAP teens used such arrangements even though they were not financially supported by the program. While the use of informal child care helped keep LEAP program costs low, in other situations child care expenses could be substantially larger depending on state certification and reimbursement policies. Informal arrangements are financially supported in many other states, but at a much lower cost per child than in child care centers or licensed home-based care.

A related issue is the "transportation triangle" created when a teen must take her child to a care provider in a different location than her home or school. In Cleveland, day care centers have been established in some of the high schools and these centers have been heavily used by LEAP teens. Together with school-based case management, these day care centers appear to have contributed to the greater impact of Cleveland's program on school completion. Support of day care centers that are in or adjacent to high schools serving large numbers of learnfare teens would make regular school attendance easier for teen parents.

The Teenage Parent Demonstration and New Chance offered another type of service — workshops — to teens. Such workshops provided teens with information about parenting, health, nutrition, drugs, family planning, workplace demands, child support, and other topics. They also helped teens develop life skills, including skills in money management, parenting, and interpersonal relations. The evaluation of the Teenage Parent Demonstration concluded that these workshops were valuable to participants, and simultaneously enabled program staff to assess participants' behavioral and cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, additional services may be needed to facilitate the transition of participants out of a learnfare program — after they graduate or are no longer age-eligible. Those seeking employment should be assisted with job search or job placement, and those seeking to enter college should be offered help with that transition. Within the welfare bureaucracy, attention must be paid to the transfer of teen recipients from specialized case mangers to "adult" case workers and welfare-to-work program staff.

What special services can be provided to school dropouts?

In many ways, dropouts present a greater challenge for learnfare programs. For the in-school teens, LEAP must keep them enrolled in school and attending regularly until they graduate or receive a GED. The dropouts, on the other hand, must first be induced to return to high school or to enter a GED program. This requires a more pronounced behavioral change, especially considering that dropouts in the LEAP study on average were older and farther behind age-for-grade level, and had more children, than the in-school teens.

While easier said than done, programs that successfully reduce pregnancy among teens will also be most effective in terms of reducing school dropout, welfare dependency, and such. Unfortunately, there are few such programs, and those that have been shown to have some success (such as the Quantum Opportunity Program, described in Chapter 1) are expensive and difficult to implement on a large scale. In general, successful approaches have involved adult mentors, working closely and intensively with teens at risk of pregnancy or school dropout.

Once a teen becomes pregnant or becomes a parent, welfare departments and schools should work together to prevent her from dropping out of school. In some cases, this may mean changing schools' rules and culture to become more accepting and accommodating of teen parents. School districts that serve larger numbers of teen parents may offer services such as child care, parenting classes, and case management in the schools.

Aside from trying to prevent school departures in the first place, policymakers may want to consider enhancements to their learnfare programs to encourage dropouts to participate and to make high schools and adult education programs more attractive to them. One possibility is expanding nontraditional education options, such as adult high schools, which would be attractive to more than just teen parents. Expanding school-to-work transition programs — several forms of which have been studied by MDRC — is another approach to providing teens increased opportunity to succeed in school. Many community colleges also provide adult education programs that include GED preparation and may be especially attractive to older teens. Providing remedial education in a college setting may facilitate subsequent transitions to post-secondary education and possible work-study arrangements. However, the New Chance program found that the college environment also poses new challenges to disadvantaged teens. Many New Chance enrollees who entered community colleges dropped out because they had difficulty managing the different learning environment and the college bureaucracy. Additional case management support may be necessary to make this transition more successful.

Another possibility is to expand GED preparation programs, especially programs that are geared to teen parents, linked to vocational schools and training

programs, and offered in locations other than high school buildings. The link between existing GED and high school diploma programs and subsequent success in the labor market may not always be clear to teens, and the fact that most programs are physically located in school buildings where teen parents may have experienced failure probably makes matter worse. Packaging GED programs with further training and employment assistance, and placing the programs in locations such as community colleges and technical schools, might increase the stature and value of the programs in the eyes of teen parents. Evaluations of the Center for Employment Training in San Jose, California, suggest that the most successful programs for disadvantaged school dropouts are programs that integrate school, vocational training, and employment assistance for both adults and youth.[2]

Should programs offer bonuses in addition to the threat of sanctions?

In their TANF plans, most states follow the rule from the 1996 federal welfare law stating that minor teen parents must be in school to be eligible for assistance under the state's TANF program. In practice, this rule usually means that the teen's part of the grant is subject to cuts if she does not comply, but her children's portion of the grant is maintained. However, in some cases noncompliance can lead to a "full-case sanction" meaning that no grant is received at all (a similar sanction now takes effect in Ohio after six months of noncompliance).

Most learnfare programs have used only welfare grant reductions (sanctions) to encourage teens to attend school. Even though this approach is straightforward, saves welfare money, and creates a "tough" image that many policymakers and politicians may be looking for, it also has important drawbacks. First, its punitive means sends a negative, rather than encouraging, message to teens. Second, it is not clear how effective sanctions alone are in promoting school outcomes. The evaluation of Wisconsin's Learnfare program, a program that uses only sanctions, has found no impacts on teens beyond increased school attendance during their first year in the program.

Third, sanctions take money away from poor families. The evaluation of LEAP found that a substantial proportion of the teens received multiple sanctions — including 10 percent of teens who received nine or more sanctions and no bonuses. The immediate effect of multiple sanctions on LEAP teens and their families, based on teens' responses to a survey, is that they spend less money on essentials for their families (especially clothing and food). The effect is softened if, as some teens reported, they manage to replace part of the income they lose by borrowing money, applying for additional Food Stamps, or seeking more child support.

2. For more on the Center for Employment Training approach and results, see Melendez, 1996.

As an alternative to a sanction-only approach, LEAP used an incentive package with both sanctions and bonuses. As discussed in Chapter 1, during the period covered by the MDRC study, a LEAP bonus raised a teen parent's monthly welfare grant from $274 to $336 (if she had only one child), and a sanction reduced it to $212. In addition to rewarding good effort, a bonus serves to increase the total size of the program's financial incentive: in LEAP, a teen parent who does not attend school loses $124 (she does not get the $62 bonus and her grant is reduced by $62) compared with what she would receive if she attended school regularly. In a sanction-only program, sanctions would have to be twice as large to achieve a financial incentive of this size, increasing the possibility that they would cause major hardship for the families of teens who fail to comply.

Of course, it costs more to offer bonus payments in addition to making grant reductions. More than three-fourths of LEAP teens earned at least one $62 bonus, and many teens earned multiple bonus payments. Still, the number of LEAP sanctions has exceeded the number of bonuses, so a net welfare saving has resulted (albeit smaller than would have resulted if only sanctions were used). Moreover, teens who received several bonuses reported spending most of the additional money on their children.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge that successful programs can turn out to be much more expensive than less successful ones, especially if bonuses increase with teen compliance. With greater compliance, the number of bonuses would have outnumbered the number of sanctions, thereby increasing program costs.

Checklist of best practices

The checklist that follows summarizes some of the key points and best practices regarding designing learnfare programs.

✔ **Be flexible.** Some teens who have dropped out of school do not want to return, and for others, especially older teens who have been out of school for a while, returning may not be appropriate. Offer alternatives to traditional high school, such as night school or GED preparation programs. In special cases, other options should be available, which might include vocational training, work experience, or job placement.

✔ **Focus on graduation.** Learnfare programs should promote high school graduation. While pursuit of a GED or participation in alternative training or employment activities may be offered as alternatives, high school attendance and graduation should be promoted and rewarded as the preferred activity. This can be done by limiting access to alternative activities or offering higher bonuses for high school attendance and completion.

- ✔ **Choose benchmarks carefully.** When deciding which measures of school performance to use, consider how these measures line up with the program's goals. For example, a program that wants to stress the teens' time commitment might focus on daily attendance as its primary criterion, while a program that is focused on academic progress might stress grade point averages and grade completion instead.

- ✔ **Make sure support services are in place.** Program effectiveness is compromised if many teens are unable to participate because they cannot find child care or cannot get to school. Therefore, support services are an essential component of any learnfare program and should be treated as an integral part of program design.

- ✔ **Include special services for dropouts.** Learnfare programs will find it much easier to keep teens in school than to work with those who have already dropped out. Therefore, it is worthwhile to provide special services and alternative activities for dropouts, such as training programs or education in adult high schools or on college campuses, and additional case management support.

- ✔ **Consider the consequences of sanctions to teens' families.** Program developers must recognize and consider the financial consequences of their learnfare provisions for the teen parents and their families. A program that sanctions teens for noncompliance will, in the aggregate, reduce the income available to many teens.

- ✔ **Provide both positive and negative incentives.** Providing bonuses as part of a learnfare program adds positive reinforcement to an otherwise strictly punitive program. This increases the program's reach and the size of the total financial incentive and it may also reduce participants' resentment about being told what to do.

- ✔ **Be willing to allocate sufficient resources.** The design of the financial incentive package provided in a learnfare program has important consequences for the overall cost of the program. The feasibility of offering bonuses depends on a state's willingness to invest additional resources in its teen parent welfare population.

Chapter 4

Implementation Challenges

As with any program, designing learnfare policies is only the first step. Administrators and staff must next implement the program, turning policies into actual mandates, activities, and services. Teens must be identified and enrolled in the program, education outcomes must be measured, and grant adjustments must be made. Staff must be able to convey the program message and encourage teens to comply with the requirements. Linkages must be established with other agencies and service providers to ensure that referrals can be made and information is communicated back and forth. The stronger the program's implementation, the more likely the program will be to achieve its goals.

The challenge of implementing a learnfare program leads to the following questions, which are discussed in this chapter:

- What key operational tasks must learnfare programs perform?
- What key staff and system capabilities must learnfare programs have?
- What are the best ways to identify and enroll eligible teens?
- How can the processing of financial incentives and sanctions be streamlined?
- What linkages with schools must be established?
- How can programs streamline monitoring of school attendance and education outcomes?

The chapter ends with a checklist of best practices related to program implementation.

What key operational tasks must learnfare programs perform?

To successfully operate a learnfare program, administrators and staff must master the mechanics of program operations. This involves three main tasks: identi-

fying eligible teens, monitoring school performance outcomes, and processing welfare grant adjustments.

The first major task is identifying eligible teens. This may be more difficult than expected. First of all, a large fraction of teen parents do not head welfare cases themselves — instead they and their child may be recipients on another welfare case, usually their mother's. Because most welfare assistance and services are targeted to case heads, welfare computer systems may not have much information on other family members. In some cases, it may be difficult even to identify teen parents who receive assistance on someone else's grant. For example, if a welfare case includes a 36-year-old woman, a 17-year-old woman, and a one-year-old-boy, the system may have no information on the relationships among the three and consequently may not be able to determine whether the baby is the brother or the son of the 17-year-old.

An added wrinkle is the fact that, depending on a particular program's rules, teen parents may move in and out of learnfare eligibility. For example, some programs might temporarily exempt teens for medical reasons or when their child is very young. Therefore, determining eligibility also involves determining who is exempt from school attendance requirements at any given time.

A second key task is monitoring school performance outcomes. Programs must be able to obtain attendance records in a timely manner and distinguish excused from unexcused absences. Programs that are also concerned with other performance measures — such as grades or grade completion — must similarly be able to obtain information on those outcomes. Although school districts in Ohio cooperated with LEAP, the coordination between county welfare agencies and schools to obtain monthly attendance reports for LEAP teens proved to be difficult and time-consuming, particularly in larger cities with many schools and education providers. The question of linkages between learnfare programs and schools is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

The third major operational task is processing welfare grant adjustments. This is difficult because in most programs the learnfare case managers — the program staff responsible for working with teens and monitoring their compliance with learnfare requirements — are not the same staff responsible for teens' eligibility for welfare and grant amounts (these are usually called eligibility workers or income maintenance workers). When a grant adjustment — either a bonus or sanction — is warranted, therefore, the case manager needs to convey that information to the income maintenance worker who implements the change. This process is further complicated by the fact that teen parent caseloads are generally dispersed among many income maintenance workers, each of whom may have a handful of teen parents on a total caseload of several hundred cases.

An inability to process sanction or bonus requests can interfere with both program operations and with the message sent to teen parents. During the early years of LEAP operations, program staff sent forms to income maintenance workers requesting the specific grant changes dictated by program rules, but these requests often received low priority and were not processed or were processed

late. LEAP staff complained that they lost credibility with teens when promised grant changes did not occur. In addition, delays in processing requests increase the lag between teens' behavior and the financial reward or penalty. This lag causes confusion among teens and may weaken the incentives' effect on behavior.

What key staff and system capabilities must learnfare programs have?

In order to meet the operational challenges listed above, learnfare programs must have the organizational capacity to communicate the program's message, requirements, and incentive system to teens, carry them out, and provide case management and support services. Programs meet these organizational capacity needs through adequate and effective staffing and computer systems.

The delivery of the program message is an important factor in the success of learnfare programs. Program staff — including both eligibility workers and case managers — must be able to convey the message clearly and consistently. All program elements, from financial incentives and support services to reporting requirements and performance standards, should reinforce the message.

To do this, an expectation of high program staff involvement with teens — on the part of both staff and participants — should be developed. Virtually all effective programs for youths have involved sustained contact between adults, playing both monitoring and supporting roles, and the program participants. Indeed, research indicates that the single factor that best explains why some youths from very disadvantaged backgrounds do better (are more "resilient") than others is the presence of an influential adult.[1]

In their interaction with participants, staff should maintain steady, purposeful contact with teens. It is especially important to convey that they will be monitoring how the participant is doing, providing feedback, holding them to program requirements, offering help that may be needed, and listening to questions and problems — and then follow through in actually doing these things. This may work particularly well when staff are outstationed in the high schools and education programs that teens attend. This type of in-school case management increased LEAP program effectiveness in Cleveland. Specifically, the increased adult support and monitoring provided by in-school case managers significantly increased the probability that teens who attended high school graduated or earned a GED.

Beyond staffing, a second key organizational capacity issue involves the development of a management information system (MIS) that adequately supports program operations. The MIS must be able to identify teens who are eligible for the program and make this information readily available to learnfare

1 Grossman and Halpern-Felsher, 1993.

staff. The system must also be able to track which of these teens have enrolled in school, the specific schools and education programs where they are enrolled, who has attended school as required and who has not, and who is no longer required to participate in the learnfare program. In addition, the system should permit program staff to record activities and communications and enter school performance information received from the schools.

The MIS should be user-friendly, give program staff the information they need to manage their caseloads, and provide administrators the aggregate data they need to assess program performance. When such a system was introduced in Ohio, it dramatically improved the performance of the LEAP program.

What are the best ways to identify and enroll eligible teens?

As noted above, learnfare staff must be able to identify teenagers who are eligible for the program before they can expose them to its requirements and support services. In most programs, income maintenance workers are responsible for reviewing welfare cases to identify teens who are eligible for learnfare and refer them to the case managers. In the absence of a computerized process, this is far from a trivial task. Moreover, it is only one aspect of income maintenance workers' jobs, which involve handling welfare eligibility determination and grant payments for what are often very large caseloads of welfare recipients.

Prior to the implementation of a sophisticated computer system in Ohio, income maintenance staff applied LEAP eligibility rules on a case-by-case basis and sent paper referrals to LEAP staff for each case. During the first two to three years of program operations, income maintenance workers in some counties missed a substantial proportion of eligible teens, in particular teens who did not head welfare cases (for example, a teen parent who lived in a household with both her mother and her child). Since welfare eligibility determination focuses on the case head, and this was an entirely manual process, these problems were difficult to overcome.

These problems in Ohio were largely eliminated with the introduction of a sophisticated computer system. Because of the features of the system — including a relationship code that must be completed for all individuals on a welfare case during welfare application interviews and whenever changes or additions to the case are made — the identification of eligible teens became an automatic process. However, the experience in Ohio indicates that some problems can persist after such a system is introduced. Problems may recur, for example, when income maintenance staff code relationships incorrectly or erroneously record a teen as a high school graduate. Still, the number of teens who have "slipped through the cracks" in Ohio is believed to have been very small since the new computer system was implemented.

Without this kind of computer capacity, it can be difficult to solve these kinds of eligibility-determination problems, especially in offices with large caseloads. Providing additional training to income maintenance workers, and using supervision to monitor their work, can reduce the number of missed cases. Adopting manual procedures can also make identification more reliable. As found in the evaluation of the Teenage Parent Demonstration, careful manual procedures, coupled with contacting teens to verify information, can offer the additional advantage of providing an opportunity to motivate participants from the start. Another approach is to use supplemental means of identifying eligible teens, such as reviewing lists of clients in health programs serving the same population. It is also possible to disseminate information in the community to increase the number of referrals from staff in schools and community agencies.

How can the processing of financial incentives and sanctions be streamlined?

Legal and practical issues make it difficult, if not impossible, to administer immediate bonuses and sanctions. It takes time to obtain attendance information, teens must have an opportunity to appeal a sanction, and there is usually a time-lag in processing the information needed to administer grant adjustments. To allow for transfer of attendance data from schools to the LEAP program and to give teens the opportunity to provide evidence of "good cause" for absences, a three-month lag between the month of attendance and the corresponding sanction or bonus was built into the LEAP program. For example, poor attendance in October triggers a program sanction in January.

Learnfare programs can create a variety of intra-organizational linkages within welfare agencies. When the arrangement calls for grant adjustments to be requested by a case management unit and carried out by income maintenance workers, grant adjustment requests may not always be processed in a timely manner. This was the case during the early years of LEAP implementation, and the problem was especially acute for grant reduction requests made in large counties.

As was the case with eligibility determination problems, the solution came with the introduction of a new computer system, which made bonus and sanction processing a largely automated process. A centralized data system for LEAP is now maintained by Ohio's Department of Human Services (ODHS) in Columbus. An attendance reporting form for each LEAP teen in Ohio is generated and mailed to schools from Columbus each month. The forms are returned to county welfare offices, where staff enter the attendance data into the central computer system. The computer system then automatically issues the appropriate bonuses and sanctions.

During its first year of operation, this system did not always work as intended. Difficulties appear to have been caused by a combination of computer

problems and incorrect use of the system by county staff. This meant that schools often did not receive information on LEAP enrollees when they were supposed to, delaying their submission of attendance data to the county welfare agencies. However, as these issues were resolved, the system worked smoothly.

In the absence of such a computer system it is crucial to develop special organizational strategies to link the case management and grant adjustment functions. One approach, used by several counties in Ohio, was to reduce communication problems by consolidating LEAP cases within a small group of designated income maintenance workers who could work more closely with LEAP staff. Another option is to train learnfare case managers to implement the grant adjustments themselves (instead of requesting that the changes be made by income maintenance staff). Still another approach is to develop systems to obtain reliable information on which grant-change requests were and were not processed — through computer checks and/or intra-agency memoranda — and then use these data to work with income maintenance supervisors to improve the process.

Finally, any lag time between teens' behavior and the financial consequences of that behavior should be explained well to the teens involved. One way to help teens understand how their grant is affected is to provide them with "statements" that outline the sanctions they have incurred and bonuses they have earned. Such statements will also reinforce the financial consequences of meeting program requirements.

What linkages with schools must be established?

Successful implementation of a learnfare program requires closer coordination and greater communication between human services agencies and education providers than typically has existed. The process of building effective institutional linkages can be complex and challenging, particularly in large cities. First, from the school's perspective, aside from the general objectives of improving student attendance and reducing the number of dropouts, there is little about learnfare that naturally promotes collaboration. Learnfare programs have included little or no special funding for schools, although higher enrollment usually generates additional funding through normal school reimbursement formulas. Moreover, education officials usually have had little or no say about how a learnfare program is designed or managed.

Second, local school districts and individual schools operate with considerably more autonomy than do welfare agencies. Thus, the roles of state education and welfare agencies, the flow of information between the two systems, and the issues that arise at the local level can vary considerably across and within states.

Staff in schools and other education programs in Ohio, Wisconsin, and other states have generally been supportive of learnfare programs and have been will-

ing to provide the necessary enrollment and attendance data. However, developing reporting procedures has sometimes been difficult, especially given the fact that learnfare programs have needed to receive data very soon after they were collected in order to maintain their strict timetables for adjusting the welfare grants of participating teens.

At a minimum, the agency responsible for administering a learnfare program must work out arrangements for (1) obtaining monthly attendance information (or data on other school performance outcomes) from individual schools and GED programs, or (2) verifying information supplied by teen parents (such as report cards). Gathering and sharing this information with a welfare agency can be more difficult for some schools than for others, particularly because eligible teens are typically concentrated in a few high schools and GED programs in any given state. The links with these schools are especially important.

In a number of Ohio schools and school districts, LEAP and school staff have gone beyond the basic linkages required for attendance reporting to address a wider set of issues. These broader relationships have often involved teachers in the GRADS program, described in Chapter 1. Because GRADS and LEAP share the objective of encouraging young parents to finish high school and serve many of the same teenagers, staff in the two programs have developed close working relationships in some schools. In many cases, GRADS teachers have voluntarily taken on the role of informal liaison between their school and the LEAP program. These linkages allow GRADS teachers and LEAP case managers to develop collaborative strategies to assist specific teens, and also help LEAP staff learn more about teens' performance in school.

In a few Ohio counties, welfare agencies and school districts have developed more formal relationships, some of which have been contractual. In Cleveland, LEAP case managers were stationed in public high schools. In another city, LEAP paid the salary of a school district official who served as a liaison to LEAP, collected all attendance information from district programs, and performed educational assessments for dropouts who returned to school after starting LEAP. In one county, LEAP has contracted with the local GRADS program to provide case management functions.

How can programs streamline monitoring of school attendance and other education outcomes?

Daily attendance tracking is difficult for several reasons. School attendance requires the cooperation of schools, with which welfare agencies have often had very limited dealings. Assuming that a good relationship with schools is developed (see the discussion above on building linkages with schools), it is important that accurate attendance information is gathered and submitted to the welfare agency on a timely basis. High schools and junior high schools collect

attendance information already, so it is just a matter of getting the data on a timely basis. For GED programs, however, it may be more difficult because staff in these programs are not usually accustomed to monitoring attendance closely.

Problems have been particularly common in high schools in large cities — Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus, Ohio, for example — and GED programs both inside and outside cities.[2] Eligible teens in large cities attend dozens of schools and programs, and some city schools have numerous teen parents. Many schools have limited administrative resources to devote to learnfare reporting, which often has not been seen as a high-priority task by school staff. All of these cities have maintained automated attendance records, but accessing those records has proven to be difficult in Milwaukee and virtually impossible in the Ohio cities.

The problems in large cities, where eligible teens are dispersed among many schools and programs, partly reflect the fact that each school or program may have its own type of attendance records. In addition, some schools and programs do not maintain the type of information required by LEAP. This is especially likely to be true of adult education programs, which traditionally have not needed to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences — a distinction critical to the LEAP attendance standards.

In some school districts, LEAP and school staff have attempted to develop centralized reporting arrangements, where data from a number of schools or programs are reported to LEAP from one source at the school district level. These arrangements have been effective in some cases, but they have not been used in Ohio's three largest cities — Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. In these cities, county agencies have directed each LEAP case manager to develop and maintain linkages with a specific set of education providers.

Several other strategies can be used to reduce the difficulty of monitoring school attendance. One is to initially monitor attendance at less frequent intervals and to focus more intensive monitoring efforts on "problem cases." As noted earlier, welfare caseworkers in Wisconsin's Learnfare program review the school enrollment status of teens on a semester basis. Only if the teen has not been enrolled, or has had too many unexcused absences during the semester, is daily attendance monitoring initiated.

A final option is to focus on a different outcome, such as course grades (as California has done in its Cal-Learn program). Grades are much easier to monitor than daily attendance. Moreover, Cal-Learn requires that teens bring report cards to the welfare office, which potentially eliminates altogether the need for school reporting (although verification may be sought from schools in some cases).

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2. The monitoring systems in Milwaukee have been changed in the wake of implementation of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program.

Checklist of best practices

The checklist that follows summarizes some of the key points and best practices on implementing learnfare programs.

✔ **Implement programs gradually.** Because implementing a learnfare program involves several challenges, it may make sense to implement the program gradually. This allows program developers to concentrate their focus during the program's start-up phase. For example, one welfare office might pilot the program, providing feedback that can facilitate county-wide or statewide implementation. This can help catch problems with staff training, computer systems, or interagency communication while they are still small.

✔ **Send a clear and consistent message.** Staff involved in learnfare programs — including those in welfare departments as well as staff in partner education programs — should all deliver the same message to teens about what the program requires and how it will support them.

✔ **Promote sustained staff involvement with teens.** Learnfare case managers should be involved with more than just monitoring teens' compliance with program rules. They should provide encouragement and support on an ongoing basis, answering questions and offering help with any problems the teens may have. Outstationing learnfare staff at high schools and education programs can facilitate this interaction.

✔ **Invest in a Management Information System.** The most effective way to identify teen parents eligible for learnfare programs, monitor their involvement, and process grant adjustments is to use a computer system that can facilitate these processes. It is important that the system have fields where all needed data — such as the age, high school status, and relationship code of every person on a welfare case — can be entered.

✔ **Make sure information is complete and accurate.** Even a sophisticated management information system is only as good as the information it holds. Staff need training in how to enter data and use the system. In addition, systems should prevent those entering data from skipping learnfare-related fields, and processes should be in place to verify and update entered information.

✔ **Provide consistent and timely incentives.** In any system that uses financial incentives to change people's behavior, it is very important to get those incentives implemented quickly and reliably. This is even more true for young high school students, who are less likely to appreciate the limits of the state's computer systems, than it is for adult welfare recipients. A streamlined pro-

cess for gathering needed information and implementing grant adjustments can tighten the perceived link between teens' actions and the effects on their grants.

✔ **Form partnerships with education providers.** Schools and other education providers play a critical role in implementing learnfare programs. In a narrow sense, schools must be counted on to provide essential information to program staff in the welfare department. In a broader sense, the involvement and commitment of school administrators is needed to provide teen parents on welfare with a safe and welcoming place to learn, to anticipate and forestall their decision to drop out after having a child, and to facilitate their return should they drop out anyway.

✔ **Minimize reporting burdens.** Especially in large cities, where reporting on attendance and other outcomes can be especially burdensome for schools, look for ways to streamline the process — for example, collect data less frequently, centralize data collection at the school district level, or help schools with the administrative resources they need for the job.

Chapter 5

Program Management

This chapter addresses some of the day-to-day management issues involved in running a learnfare program. They include issues of organizational structure, staff roles and responsibilities, program costs, and evaluation. In particular, this chapter answers the following questions:

- Who should be responsible for running learnfare programs?
- What duties should program staff have, and how large should caseloads be?
- What can administrators do to set the right tone for program success?
- How can programs maximize participation?
- What can be done about teens who fail to comply with program rules?
- How can program effectiveness be evaluated?

The chapter ends with a checklist of best practices related to program management.

Who should be responsible for running learnfare programs?

Most existing learnfare programs are managed by state welfare departments and operated locally by either regional offices (in state-administered welfare programs) or county welfare agencies (in county-administered programs). However, other arrangements are possible. One option is to subcontract some or all program functions to teachers or staff in or adjacent to schools and other education programs. For example, one Ohio county subcontracted LEAP to the GRADS program (the school-based program for pregnant and parenting students that was described earlier). In that county, LEAP administrative responsibilities were added to the existing duties of teachers in the GRADS program.

The arrangement worked smoothly. In another Ohio county, selected program functions were contracted to a school district official with many years of pertinent experience working with at-risk students.

A third option is to use welfare agency staff, but to outstation those staff in school buildings. This can facilitate program management by centralizing administration, while at the same time creating a program presence in the schools that teen parents attend. MDRC's research in Cleveland indicates that putting LEAP case managers in high schools can significantly increase the likelihood that teens who attend school stay there and graduate or receive a GED.

If a welfare agency is running the program, a related question concerns which staff should be involved. Needed functions typically belong to various units within welfare agencies — in particular, functions around eligibility and grant determinations and those that deal with case management and support services. Programs must decide whether to assign all functions to one unit or coordinate the efforts of more than one unit. In Wisconsin, as well as in some counties in Ohio, all program functions were initially assigned to income maintenance workers, the staff who are responsible for determining welfare eligibility and calculating grant amounts. This approach simplified the implementation of welfare grant reductions and increases, but frequently it also meant that staff with little or no relevant experience were carrying out intensive case management work. Wisconsin later assigned some program functions to case managers (separate from the income maintenance staff), and several Ohio counties developed case management training for the income maintenance staff to improve their ability to work with LEAP teens.

In other cases, learnfare case management functions have been assigned to units with staff more accustomed to providing social services, counseling, and monitoring. This may improve case management, but it also may lead to more problems making grant adjustments. A key management issue therefore becomes how to promote communication between staff who share responsibility for learnfare participants. During the first two to three years of operation of Ohio's LEAP program, counties that depended on JOBS (the welfare-to-work program) or social services units encountered problems carrying out welfare grant sanctions and increases. These problems usually occurred because it was difficult to develop procedures to ensure that grant adjustments requested by case managers were actually carried out by the income maintenance staff. Later, when a sophisticated statewide computer system was implemented (which made grant adjustments automatic), these problems were virtually eliminated.

Another related decision is whether to place learnfare case managers in a new, specialized unit, assigning them to work only with learnfare cases, or to have staff work with both learnfare teens and other welfare/social services cases, or with other students. In Ohio some counties created new departmental structures, including new job descriptions, to facilitate coordination of the various LEAP functions. Other counties divided the functions, most often assigning responsibility for case management to JOBS or social services staff and responsi-

bility for grant adjustments to income maintenance staff. A third possibility is to designate welfare agency staff to handle most case management, grant adjustment, and other functions, but assign other functions (such as child care assistance) to other agencies through contracts.

What duties should program staff have, and how large should caseloads be?

Decisions about how to define staff roles are closely related to the decision about where to locate the program because both types of choices are influenced by administrators' views of the scope of the learnfare case management function. In general, a decision to assign all or most program functions to social services or JOBS staff within a welfare agency, or to school staff or workers in another human services agency, is consistent with an expansive view of the learnfare staff role. These staff are better able to offer counseling, address specific teen parent problems, discuss education options available in the community, and so forth.

Assigning most program functions to income maintenance staff in the welfare agency does not necessarily signal that administrators are less interested in providing comprehensive services to teens. It may indicate instead a feeling that the grant adjustment function of a learnfare program is critically important, and that income maintenance workers are most capable of handling this function. However, unless income maintenance staff are selected who have pertinent work experience or are provided with special training, the learnfare staff role is likely to be defined rather narrowly.

Once the more general staffing decisions are made, administrators must decide which activities program staff perform. It is important to maintain contact with teens throughout their period of learnfare eligibility and to help them make a successful transition to the labor market or to an adult welfare-to-work program once they are no longer eligible. Ideally, this contact should be both supportive and demanding.

It is less clear how intensive case management should be to be effective. At a minimum, enough staff time is needed to determine eligibility, explain program rules, monitor school activity (attendance, enrollment, grades, and/or completion), adjust grants, and refer teens to child care and transportation services. This amount of staff time could be relatively small, especially if the program has sophisticated computer capabilities. (See Chapter 4 for more on key staff capabilities that learnfare programs need.)

In Ohio, LEAP rules have required that county welfare agencies assign each teen a case manager, but the rules have also given agencies considerable discretion in defining the job. In some counties, the position has been largely administrative, focused mainly on the steps necessary to making appropriate welfare grant changes and referring teens for child care assistance. In other counties,

however, case managers have been proactive in addressing the barriers that teens face in attending school regularly. For example, staff have undertaken outreach activities with noncompliant teens, conducted home visits, performed in-depth assessments, offered counseling, and actively sought to ensure that teens obtained the child care and other assistance they need.

A related issue is that of caseload size. Caseload sizes in LEAP vary according to a number of factors, including funding, the availability of additional resources, the county's success in identifying eligible teens, and local decisions about how funding allocations and other resources can be used. For instance, while some counties in the LEAP evaluation contracted out some services for the teens, in the process they took some of the funding away from LEAP case managers, which increased caseloads. Caseloads that are too large make it difficult to operate learnfare programs effectively. Intensive case management, of the kind described above, requires smaller caseloads, and thus has budget implications. MDRC's research on a special LEAP initiative in Cleveland suggests that increased case management time spent per teen may increase program effectiveness, albeit at considerable cost.

In general, case managers estimated that a caseload of 75 is the right size if they are expected to provide assistance beyond basic processing and monitoring. However, the LEAP study found that actual caseloads size ranged from 40 to 200. In one county, case managers had caseloads of 200, but did not perform any income maintenance work, and more extensive services were contracted out to another service provider. In another county, staff have about 40 cases each, but they handle both the income maintenance and the LEAP case management functions, including the income maintenance functions for the other assistance cases in the teen's household. In the Teenage Parent Demonstration, caseload sizes ranged from 50 to 100. While their monitoring role seemed less substantial, in comparison to LEAP, these workers had more responsibilities, including conducting frequent workshops.

What can administrators do to set the right tone for program success?

Regardless of who operates learnfare on the local level, the nature of the program may depend on how it is managed — for example, the degree to which it is administered by local staff rather than state officials. Some policy decisions, such as establishing or changing program eligibility rules, necessarily involve state decisions. However, decentralizing as much decision-making as possible encourages local initiative and accountability. In Ohio, the latitude given to counties allowed them to respond quickly to problems and to experiment with innovative approaches to LEAP. This accounted for much of the improvement in the program during its first few years of operation. MDRC analysts concluded that

this was an important factor in the program's ability to overcome early implementation problems quickly.

Similarly, giving individual staff flexibility in working with their caseload and a role in providing upward feedback on program policy and operations can foster staff "ownership" of the program and commitment to making it work. The local county programs in Ohio also developed differently as staff molded the flexible LEAP model to suit local strengths, interests, and program philosophy. These differences could be observed in the organizational approaches they chose, the relative emphasis they placed on proactive case management, several aspects of their response to teen noncompliance, and the amount of input staff had in teens' education choices.

Learnfare administrators also play an important role in promoting the program's message and making the program a priority among staff. Especially if specialized staff are not assigned to teen parents, administrators need to emphasize that staff should focus on this subgroup of their caseloads. This can be done through staff training, daily supervision, and performance expectations. As noted in Chapter 4, the strength and clarity of the "stay in school" message can play an important role in a learnfare program's success.

Finally, program administrators can help facilitate coordination and communication between the various staff, units, agencies, and organizations that may be involved in learnfare programs. Establishing relationships at the upper levels of these organizations, and developing procedures for communication among line staff, can ease the jobs of staff who must share information and work together to meet the needs of teen parents.

How can programs maximize participation?

There are several steps that learnfare programs can take to maximize participation by teen parents. For example, it is important that staff identify, contact, and begin working with teens as soon as possible. Research has often shown that programs that begin working with youths at the first sign of serious trouble — before problems have become "insurmountable" — have a greater chance of engagement and success.[1] Chapter 4 includes suggestions for expediting the identification and enrollment of eligible teens.

For in-school youths, an early program intervention is one that occurs before students have fallen substantially behind their age-for-grade level. Learnfare and other programs typically have had much more difficulty working with school dropouts. However, even with dropouts, it helps for program participation to commence as soon as possible after young people have left school and before they have fallen far behind their peers.

Learnfare programs can also maximize compliance by utilizing all the strategies available to them — in particular, both bonuses and sanctions, and case

1. Long, 1998.

management encouragement and support. Even though rewards and penalties can influence the behavior of youth, as well as adults, learnfare programs should not rely on their financial incentives to do all the work of the program. Furthermore, all program elements should reinforce the same message. In LEAP the financial incentive structure has effectively communicated the "stay in school" message. At the same time, program staff have encouraged achievement — praising effort and academic achievement — and have tried to remove barriers to school success. All these attempts at reinforcing the teens' positive efforts have been bolstered by the bonus payments. Case managers have also criticized poor attitude, effort, and performance; and the sanctions have unmistakably reinforced this theme.

Finally, program staff can maximize participation by closely monitoring teens' compliance and quickly following up with those who miss school and otherwise fall off track. Case managers should try to quickly reengage these teens by reinforcing the program's requirements and addressing any reasons for the noncompliance. It may also be useful to review the teen's participation options to see whether an alternative activity may be more appropriate.

What can be done about teens who fail to comply with program rules?

To deal with teens who repeatedly fail to comply with program requirements, LEAP's sanctioning system was expanded and revised in 1996. Teens who have two consecutive sanctions are now required to attend a face-to-face interview with their case manager. In that interview the case manager attempts to resolve any issues or barriers that may interfere with the teen's compliance. However, unless the teen is subsequently exempted, the entire cash grant paid on behalf of the teen and her children is eliminated after six consecutive months of sanctions. (Even though the teen will no longer receive cash assistance at that point, she remains eligible for Medicaid.)

This places additional pressure on teens to comply with program rules, which should limit the number of teens who are sanctioned repeatedly. However, increasing the penalty for noncompliance this way also brings greater potential harm to the families involved. When learnfare program sanctions penalize teens for failing to attend school, they also reduce support for the teens' children. This income loss can be substantial in the case of families whose grants are continuously reduced for noncompliance. It is noteworthy that one in ten LEAP teens received nine or more grant reductions, and no bonuses, during the time they were in the program. These same teens typically made little or no progress in school, and their families suffered from reduced income. This, in turn, creates a responsibility for case managers and other program staff to help noncompliant teens overcome any barriers to participation they may experience.

Another response is to offer some teens, particularly older teens who have reached age 18 or 19, or teens who have been out of school a long time, the chance to satisfy a program's attendance requirement through activities other than high school or GED programs — for example, attending a vocational training program, holding a community work experience assignment, or actively looking for a job. Such alternative training and employment options should be offered only after a teen has been sanctioned several times, thereby continuing to send teens the message that finishing school is the best thing to do.

In any case, program staff should be required to initiate face-to-face meetings with teens who have been sanctioned several times in order to find out what is going on before continuing to cut their welfare payments. Is the teen homeless, suffering from substance abuse, or in need of medical help or counseling? One of the services tested in the special LEAP demonstration program in Cleveland went a step further: a community outreach worker (someone who did not work for the welfare department) was assigned to teens who had been sanctioned in order to help the teens overcome barriers to attending school. This approach may be helpful in addressing the needs of frequently sanctioned teens. Also, these workers may make specific recommendations to welfare departments about appropriate help (or possible exemptions) for these teens.

How can program effectiveness be evaluated?

Learnfare programs are intended to produce a chain of effects on teens' behavior, starting with increased school enrollment and attendance and culminating in reduced welfare dependence. To determine whether the LEAP program successfully created such a chain, MDRC compared the experience of teens eligible for LEAP with that of a randomly selected control group that was not subject to LEAP. The results of the LEAP evaluation are summarized in Chapter 1.

Most state and local administrators will not have a control group against which to measure program success. Instead, program managers can establish performance standards, based on the research on LEAP and other programs, that provide relatively good measures of success. For example, in Cleveland at the time of the LEAP study, the high school graduation rate for all students varied from 26 to 42 percent depending on the school. MDRC's research indicates that in Cleveland the graduation rate among initially enrolled teens in LEAP was 24 percent after three years, compared with 17 percent for the control group, with about 9 percent in each group still enrolled in high school.

These numbers suggest that the LEAP program in Cleveland lifted the graduation rate of teen parents who were enrolled in school when they started LEAP to about the same level as other students. Program managers in other cities, especially those with school attendance and graduation rates similar to Cleveland's, might also seek to raise teen parent graduation rates to those of the student body as a whole.

The LEAP results can also help other states set realistic expectations for their learnfare programs. It is important to remember that while financial incentives are capable of changing teen behavior and reducing welfare receipt, there are real limits to what financial incentives alone can achieve. For example, LEAP has been far more effective keeping initially enrolled teens in school until they finished their education than inducing dropouts to go back to school and stay until completion. This result makes intuitive sense: it is understandable that a financial incentive could be sufficient to keep students in school, but not enough to persuade dropouts (who, on average, had been out of school more than 15 months when they became eligible for LEAP) to return to school.

The most recent LEAP results also suggest that improved school performance can translate into increased employment and reduced welfare receipt, but that these effects may not be as large or long-lasting as policymakers might hope. This underscores the importance of encouraging realistic expectations and resisting political pressure to overpromise what learnfare can deliver. It also indicates that much remains to be learned about how to make learnfare programs effective in increasing self-sufficiency and reducing welfare dependence and how to manage the transition from learnfare to programs that encourage skills training, college attendance, and employment.

Even very successful programs have not produced the kind of results that policymakers and politicians hoped for when they designed these programs. Yet these programs offer important foundations to build on. To achieve stronger results, a more comprehensive strategy may be needed, one that combines learnfare programs with school improvement, pregnancy prevention, and access to training and better jobs, and one that extends beyond the teen parents in learnfare programs to their families and communities.

Finally, in evaluating learnfare programs, it is important to go beyond program statistics kept in the state or county computer system. There is much to be learned from case file reviews, surveys of staff, visits to program sites and schools, and focus groups with teen participants. These techniques can provide more qualitative information about how staff and teens experience the program, what works and does not work, and where more intensive intervention may be useful. Such information can help localities develop learnfare programs that are customized for their specific circumstances and are most likely to be successful in the long run.

Checklist of best practices

The checklist that follows summarizes some of the key points and best practices on managing learnfare programs.

✔ **Build-in local flexibility.** Allowing some flexibility in designing and implementing learnfare programs gives local offices and staff ownership of the program and allows them to tailor it to meet local needs.

- ✔ **Outstation staff in schools.** Staff stationed in the education settings that learnfare participants attend can more closely monitor school attendance and progress, and are also a more visible presence for participants. The addition of school-based case management in Cleveland appears to have increased the program's effectiveness by increasing the proportion of teens who, once enrolled, eventually received a high school diploma or GED.

- ✔ **Balance enforcement of requirements with support and encouragement.** One of the most challenging jobs of case managers is balancing the roles of monitoring and enforcing program compliance with providing positive support and advice. Many staff find that the most effective way to do this is by offering to be a partner with the teen in accomplishing her education goals, while making the program rules clear from the start and quickly enforcing them when warranted.

- ✔ **Follow up with noncompliant teens.** When teens are sanctioned repeatedly for noncompliance, this is a sign that the program is not working for them. Increasing the penalty for noncompliance may work for some teens, but may also hurt others more. Progressive sanctioning must be accompanied by progressively more intensive case management, as staff look for ways to engage these teens.

- ✔ **Monitoring program outcomes.** Program administrators should develop benchmarks and performance standards for their learnfare programs against which to systematically compare key program outcomes, including attendance and graduation rates and measures of academic progress.

- ✔ **Form realistic expectations.** Understanding the limitations of a learnfare program can guard against overpromising and setting unrealistic expectations. Use both the results of similar programs and a baseline of outcomes for teens with characteristics like those in the program to estimate expected outcomes and establish targets for success.

Appendix A

Teenage Parent Provisions of the 1996 Federal Welfare Law

This appendix summarizes the teenage parent provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The law replaces the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants to states, giving states great discretion in designing and operating their welfare programs. It also includes some requirements and constraints on the expenditure of block grant funds. Some of these conditions and prohibitions — summarized below — pertain to teenage parents on welfare. Others involve considerations such as standards for participation in work activities.

Requirements related to teen parents

Staying in school. States may not use federal TANF funds to provide assistance to an individual who is under the age of 18, is not married, has a child at least 12 weeks old in his or her care, and has not successfully completed high school (or its equivalent) unless that individual participates in education activities directed toward the attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent, or in an alternative education or training program approved by the state. States have the authority to define acceptable alternative education and training programs.

Living at home. States may not use federal TANF funds to provide assistance to an individual who is under the age of 18, is not married, and has a minor child in his or her care, unless the individual resides with a parent, legal guardian, or other adult relative. If no such living arrangement is available, or if the state determines that it is not in the best interest of the minor child, the state must then assist the teen parent in locating a second-chance home, maternity home, or other adult-supervised living arrangement.

Time limit. States may not use TANF funds to provide assistance for more than 60 months (whether consecutive or not) to anyone, including custodial teenage parents who head a household or are married to the head of a household. States

may exempt up to 20 percent of their entire caseload — including adults as well as custodial teen parents — from this time limit.

Work requirement. Teenage parents who head a household are included in the calculation of the work participation rate that states must meet to receive TANF funds. The denominator is the total number of families receiving assistance that include an adult or minor head of household minus those in sanction status. Teen parents can count toward the numerator if they maintain satisfactory attendance in a high school or an equivalent program (regardless of the number of hours) or participate in education directly related to employment for at least the minimum number of hours specified in the legislation (20 hours per week in fiscal year 1998, 25 hours in fiscal year 1999, and 30 hours after fiscal year 1999).

Special provisions for parents of young children

Option to exempt from work requirements. States have the option to exempt unmarried custodial parents who are caring for a child under 12 months old from the participation requirements. However, when these parents are minor (under 18 years old), they still are required to be in school to be eligible for federal TANF assistance.

Limited hours requirements. Unmarried parents with children under six years of age will meet the participation requirement if engaged in 20 hour of work or participation in another allowable activity (even in fiscal year 1999 and beyond, when the overall hours requirement has increased to more than 20 hours).

Sanction limitations. Unmarried parents with children under age six cannot be sanctioned for failure to work or participate in another allowable activity if they cannot obtain needed child care. However, the state may not disregard individuals who cannot find child care in determining its participation rate (see above).

Continuation of waivers

States have the option to continue federal waivers — such as the waivers Ohio received to run the LEAP program — that were in effect as of the date of enactment (August 22, 1996). Until the waiver expires, the law does not apply to the extent that it is inconsistent with the waiver.

Appendix B

Tables from the LEAP Evaluation

Table B.1

LEAP's 12-Month Impacts on School Enrollment, by Initial School Enrollment Status

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
Full 12-Month Survey Sample				
In the 12 months after random assignment				
Enrolled 10 or more months in (%)[a]				
High school	36.0	28.7	7.3***	25.4
A GED program	6.2	3.5	2.7**	77.1
Average number of months enrolled in[a]				
High school	4.8	4.2	0.6**	14.3
A GED program	1.3	0.8	0.5***	62.5
Sample size	605	583		
Sample Members Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
In the 12 months after random assignment				
Enrolled 10 or more months in (%)[a]				
High school	56.2	46.9	9.3**	19.8
A GED program	5.4	3.5	1.9	54.3
Average number of months enrolled in[a]				
High school	7.3	6.6	0.7*	10.6
A GED program	0.9	0.7	0.3	42.9
Sample size	349	319		
Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
In the 12 months after random assignment				
Enrolled 10 or more months in (%)[a]				
High school	10.1	4.9	5.2**	106.1
A GED program	7.3	3.5	3.8*	108.6
Average number of months enrolled in[a]				
High school	1.5	1.0	0.5*	50.0
A GED program	1.7	0.9	0.8***	88.9
Sample size	256	264		

SOURCES: Bos and Fellerath, 1997, p. 37. MDRC calculations using data from Teen Parent Information Sheets and the LEAP 12-month survey.

NOTES: Differences, as well as program and control group means, are regression-adjusted to correct for slight differences between program and control groups in baseline characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as ***= 1 percent; **= 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

a. Months after teens graduated from high school or received a GED are counted as months of enrollment.

Table B.2

LEAP's Three-Year Impacts on Grade Completion, High School Graduation, and GED Receipt, by Initial School Enrollment Status

Status Three Years After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
Full Three-Year Survey Sample				
Ever completed (%)				
Grade 9	89.4	86.1	3.2*	3.7
Grade 10	74.0	69.0	5.0**	7.2
Grade 11	50.0	45.4	4.6*	10.1
Ever graduated from high school (%)	22.9	23.5	-0.6	-2.6
Ever received a GED (%)	11.1	8.4	2.7	32.1
Ever graduated from high school or received a GED (%)	34.0	31.9	2.1	6.6
Sample size	446	467		
Sample Members Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever completed (%)				
Grade 9	94.0	91.1	2.9	3.2
Grade 10	81.3	79.6	1.8	2.3
Grade 11	60.6	58.1	2.5	4.3
Ever graduated from high school (%)	35.6	34.2	1.4	4.1
Ever received a GED (%)	10.0	4.4	5.6**	127.3
Ever graduated from high school or received a GED (%)	45.6	38.6	7.0*	18.1
Sample size	267	260		
Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever completed (%)				
Grade 9	81.5	80.8	0.7	0.9
Grade 10	62.8	55.8	6.9	12.4
Grade 11	35.8	28.0	7.8*	27.9
Ever graduated from high school (%)	6.7	7.8	-1.1	-14.1
Ever received a GED (%)	12.0	14.3	-2.3	-16.1
Ever graduated from high school or received a GED (%)	18.6	22.1	-3.4	-15.4
Sample size	179	207		

SOURCES: Bos and Fellerath, 1997, p. 38. MDRC calculations using data from Teen Parent Information Sheets and the LEAP three-year survey.

NOTES: Differences, as well as program and control group means, are regression-adjusted to correct for slight differences between program and control groups in baseline characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Table B.3

LEAP's Four-Year Impacts on Employment and Earnings

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
		Full Sample		
Ever employed (%)				
Quarters 3-4	27.1	24.5	2.5	10.4
Quarters 5-8	43.8	40.6	3.1*	7.7
Quarters 9-12	51.3	49.8	1.4	2.9
Quarters 13-16	61.0	59.6	1.4	2.3
Quarters 3-16	78.2	76.6	1.6	2.1
Ever employed in quarter 16 (%)	39.9	39.4	0.5	1.4
Number of quarters employed				
Quarters 3-16	3.99	3.88	0.11	2.8
Total earnings ($)				
Quarters 3-4	315	252	64*	25.3
Quarters 5-8	927	808	119	14.8
Quarters 9-12	1,311	1,320	-9	-0.7
Quarters 13-16	1,852	1,914	-61	-3.2
Quarters 3-16	4,405	4,293	112	2.6
Sample size	3,479	672		
Sample Members Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever employed (%)				
Quarters 3-4	28.9	23.7	5.2**	21.9
Quarters 5-8	46.4	39.7	6.7***	17.0
Quarters 9-12	55.7	54.7	1.0	1.9
Quarters 13-16	65.1	60.5	4.6*	7.6
Quarters 3-16	81.6	80.6	1.0	1.2
Ever employed in quarter 16 (%)	44.6	40.9	3.7	9.1
Number of quarters employed				
Quarters 3-16	4.41	4.03	0.38**	9.4
Total earnings ($)				
Quarters 3-4	343	242	101*	41.9
Quarters 5-8	1,040	812	228*	28.0
Quarters 9-12	1,465	1,342	124	9.2
Quarters 13-16	2,014	1,923	91	4.7
Quarters 3-16	4,862	4,319	544	12.6
Sample size	1,917	355		

(continued)

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever employed (%)				
Quarters 3-4	25.3	25.8	-0.5	-2.1
Quarters 5-8	41.0	42.2	-1.2	-2.8
Quarters 9-12	46.3	44.0	2.4	5.3
Quarters 13-16	56.3	58.8	-2.6	-4.4
Quarters 3-16	74.4	72.3	2.1	2.9
Ever employed in quarter 16 (%)	34.7	37.8	-3.1	-8.3
Number of quarters employed				
Quarters 3-16	3.52	3.72	-0.20	-5.4
Total earnings ($)				
Quarters 3-4	292	270	22	8.1
Quarters 5-8	816	816	-0	-0.0
Quarters 9-12	1,144	1,287	-143	-11.1
Quarters 13-16	1,678	1,898	-220	-11.6
Quarters 3-16	3,930	4,271	-341	-8.0
Sample size	1,562	317		

SOURCE: Bos and Fellerath, 1997, pp. 50, 52. MDRC calculations from Ohio Unemployment Insurance (UI) earnings records.

NOTES: For each individual sample member, the follow-up period started with the quarter in which the teen was randomly assigned. Therefore, quarter 1 is the three-month period starting with the first month of the calendar quarter in which the sample member was randomly assigned.

Calculations for this table used data for all 4,151 sample members randomly assigned between mid-August 1990 and September 1991 for whom there were 14 quarters of follow-up data, including those with values of zero for outcomes. Employment and earnings data for quarters 1 and 2 were not available for this analysis.

The averages or percentages are regression-adjusted controlling for 38 kinds of differences in characteristics before random assignment.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as "*" = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Table B.4

LEAP's Impacts on AFDC Receipt in Years 3 and 4 (Quarters 9-16)

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
		Full Sample		
Ever received AFDC (%)				
Quarters 9-10	79.9	82.5	-2.6*	-3.2
Quarters 11-12	75.7	80.5	-4.8***	-5.9
Quarters 13-14	70.5	75.6	-5.1***	-6.7
Quarters 15-16	67.8	69.2	-1.4	-2.1
Years 3 and 4	86.0	88.9	-2.9**	-3.3
Ever received AFDC in quarter 16 (%)	61.5	60.9	0.6	1.1
Number of months on AFDC				
Years 3 and 4	15.27	16.03	-0.76**	-4.7
AFDC amount received ($)				
Quarters 9-10	1,415	1,491	-76**	-5.1
Quarters 11-12	1,347	1,445	-98***	-6.8
Quarters 13-14	1,235	1,299	-64*	-4.9
Quarters 15-16	1,187	1,224	-37	-3.0
Years 3 and 4	5,185	5,459	-275**	-5.0
Sample size	3,479	672		
Sample Members Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever received AFDC (%)				
Quarters 9-10	80.9	83.0	-2.1	-2.5
Quarters 11-12	76.8	82.1	-5.3**	-6.4
Quarters 13-14	72.3	77.0	-4.7**	-6.1
Quarters 15-16	68.6	70.3	-1.7	-2.5
Years 3 and 4	87.0	89.4	-2.4	-2.6
Ever received AFDC in quarter 16 (%)	62.0	62.6	-0.6	-0.9
Number of months on AFDC				
Years 3 and 4	15.55	16.35	-0.80*	-4.9
AFDC amount received ($)				
Quarters 9-10	1,411	1,479	-68	-4.6
Quarters 11-12	1,347	1,467	-120**	-8.2
Quarters 13-14	1,241	1,317	-76	-5.8
Quarters 15-16	1,182	1,233	-52	-4.2
Years 3 and 4	5,181	5,497	-316**	-5.7
Sample size	1,917	355		

(continued)

Outcome and Period After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	Percentage Change
Sample Members Not Enrolled in High School or in a GED Program at Random Assignment				
Ever received AFDC (%)				
Quarters 9-10	78.3	81.5	-3.2	-3.9
Quarters 11-12	73.9	78.2	-4.2*	-5.4
Quarters 13-14	67.9	73.6	-5.7**	-7.7
Quarters 15-16	66.7	67.6	-0.9	-1.4
Years 3 and 4	84.5	88.0	-3.5*	-4.0
Ever received AFDC in quarter 16 (%)	61.1	58.9	2.2	3.7
Number of months on AFDC				
Years 3 and 4	14.86	15.57	-0.71	-4.6
AFDC amount received ($)				
Quarters 9-10	1,416	1,498	-82*	-5.5
Quarters 11-12	1,340	1,412	-72	-5.1
Quarters 13-14	1,224	1,274	-50	-4.0
Quarters 15-16	1,192	1,211	-19	-1.5
Years 3 and 4	5,172	5,395	-223	-4.1
Sample size	1,562	317		

SOURCE: Bos and Fellerath, 1997, pp. 74, 75. MDRC calculations from Ohio Department of Human Services (ODHS) AFDC records.

NOTES: For each individual sample member, the follow-up period started with the quarter in which the teen was randomly assigned. Therefore, quarter 1 is the three-month period starting with the first month of the calendar quarter in which the sample member was randomly assigned.

Calculations for this table used data for all 4,151 sample members randomly assigned between mid-August 1990 and September 1991, including those with values of zero for outcomes. AFDC data for years 1 and 2 (quarters 1-8) were not available for this analysis.

The averages or percentages are regression-adjusted controlling for 38 kinds of differences in characteristics before random assignment.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

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Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert C. Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Three-Year Impacts of Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1996. David Long, Judith M. Gueron, Robert G. Wood, Rebecca Fisher, Veronica Fellerath.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

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Time Limits

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Implementing Time-Limited Welfare: Early Experiences in Three States. 1995. Dan Bloom, David Butler.

The View from the Field: As Time Limits Approach, Welfare Recipients and Staff Talk About Their Attitudes and Expectations. 1997. Amy Brown, Dan Bloom, David Butler.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Jobs First: Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes, Claudia Nicholson.

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Early Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1997. Dan Bloom, James J. Kemple, Robin Rogers-Dillon.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James J. Kemple, Nandita Verma.

Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

WRP: Implementation and Early Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1998. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Patricia Auspos.

Financial Incentives

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

MFIP: An Early Report on Minnesota's Approach to Welfare Reform. 1995. Virginia Knox, Amy Brown, Winston Lin.

Making Welfare Work and Work Pay: Implementation and 18-Month Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 1997. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Patricia Auspos, Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Alan Orenstein.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

The New Hope Offer: Participants in the New Hope Demonstration Discuss Work, Family, and Self-Sufficiency. 1996. Dudley Benoit.

Creating New Hope: Implementation of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1997. Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Veronica Fellerath, Michael Wiseman.

Who Got New Hope? 1997. Michael Wiseman.

An Early Look at Community Service Jobs in the New Hope Demonstration. 1998. Susan M. Poglinco, Julian Brash, Robert C. Granger.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Creating an Alternative to Welfare: First-Year Findings on the Implementation, Welfare Impacts, and Costs of the Self-Sufficiency Project (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation [SRDC]). 1995. Tod Mijanovich, David Long.

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When Work Pays Better Than Welfare: A Summary of the Self-Sufficiency Project's Implementation, Focus Group, and Initial 18-Month Impact Reports (SRDC). 1996.

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Do Work Incentives Have Unintended Consequences? Measuring "Entry Effects" in the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1998. Gordon Berlin, Wendy Bancroft, David Card, Winston Lin, Philip K. Robins.

When Financial Incentives Encourage Work: Complete 18-Month Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project. 1998. Winston Lin, Philip K. Robins, David Card, Kristen Harknett, Susanna Lui-Gurr.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

A large-scale study (formerly known as the JOBS Evaluation) of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Adult Education for People on AFDC: A Synthesis of Research (U.S. Department of Education [ED]/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). 1995. Edward Pauly.

Early Findings on Program Impacts in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1995. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs (Russell Sage Foundation). 1995. Daniel Friedlander, Gary Burtless.

Monthly Participation Rates in Three Sites and Factors Affecting Participation Levels in Welfare-to-Work Programs (HHS/ED). 1995. Gayle Hamilton.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Evaluating Two Welfare-to-Work Program Approaches: Two-Year Findings on the Labor Force Attachment and Human Capital Development Programs in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1997. Gayle Hamilton, Thomas Brock, Mary Farrell, Daniel Friedlander, Kristen Harknett.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of the Portland (Oregon) Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 1998. Susan Scrivener, Gayle Hamilton, Mary Farrell, Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Christine Schwartz.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Preliminary Findings on Participation Patterns and First-Year Impacts. 1998. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Low-Income Parents and the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. 1996. Earl Johnson, Fred Doolittle.

Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Suzanne Lynn.

Other

Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1995. James A. Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James J. Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James A. Riccio.

Education Reform

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Program Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel A. Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this 10-site study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James J. Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James J. Kemple.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Tulsa's IndEx Program: A Business-Led Initiative for Welfare Reform and Economic Development. 1997. Maria Buck.

Washington Works: Sustaining a Vision of Welfare Reform Based on Personal Change, Work Preparation, and Employer Involvement. 1998. Susan Gooden.

Cost Analysis Step by Step: A How-to Guide for Planners and Providers of Welfare-to-Work and Other Employment and Training Programs. 1998. David Greenberg, Ute Appenzeller.

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

A Research Framework for Evaluating Jobs-Plus, a Saturation and Place-Based Employment Initiative for Public Housing Residents. 1998. James A. Riccio.

Section 3 Public Housing Study

An examination of the effectiveness of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act in affording employment opportunities for public housing residents.

Lessons from the Field on the Implementation of Section 3 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). 1996. Maxine Bailey, Suzanne Lynn.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Implementing the Earnings Supplement Project: A Test of a Re-employment Incentive (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). 1997. Howard Bloom, Barbara Fink, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Wendy Bancroft, Doug Tattrie.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit social policy research organization founded in 1974 and located in New York City and San Francisco. Its mission is to design and rigorously field-test promising education and employment-related programs aimed at improving the well-being of disadvantaged adults and youth, and to provide policymakers and practitioners with reliable evidence on the effectiveness of social programs. Through this work, and its technical assistance to program administrators, MDRC seeks to enhance the quality of public policies and programs. MDRC actively disseminates the results of its research through its publications and through interchanges with a broad audience of policymakers and practitioners; state, local, and federal officials; program planners and operators; the funding community; educators; scholars; community and national organizations; the media; and the general public.

Over the past two decades — working in partnership with more than forty states, the federal government, scores of communities, and numerous private philanthropies — MDRC has developed and studied more than three dozen promising social policy initiatives.

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